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Thoughts on present and past
state of religious parties

To the Editor of the
Congregationalist

THE
PAST AND PRESENT STATE
OF
Religious Parties.

THOUGHTS

ON
THE PAST AND PRESENT

STATE OF RELIGIOUS PARTIES

IN ENGLAND.

BY ROBERT VAUGHAN, D.D.

PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT AND MODERN HISTORY IN
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON.

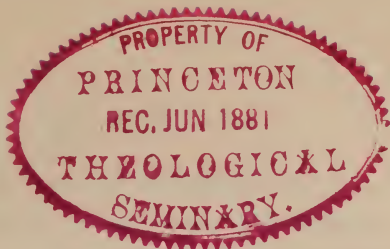
Τὸ δὲ μέλλετ' ἀκούμεν, ὡς ἑτεόν περ.
'ΟΜΗΡΟΣ.

“Above all things put on charity, which is the bond
of perfectness.”—COLLOSSIANS iii. 14.

LONDON:
JACKSON AND WALFORD,
18, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD.

1838.

LONDON:
R. CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD-STREET-HILL.



TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

CHARLES JAMES BLOMFIELD, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

MY LORD,

THE substance of the present publication was delivered as a Discourse in Union-Street Chapel, Southwark, on the second of January last. Fifty years had then passed since the day on which that chapel was opened for divine worship; and the christian church still assembling there, claims to be regarded as the oldest Independent or Congregational church in the kingdom; tracing its descent from a church of that order, formed in the

borough of Southwark, by the Rev. Henry Jacob, a seceded clergyman, in the year 1616. Many intelligent and devout persons, to whom these facts were known, became desirous that an occasion so well adapted to awaken profitable reflection should not pass without notice. A religious service, accordingly, took place; the gentlemen from various congregations who were present, and who afterwards dined together, requested that the Discourse which they had heard in the morning should be printed, and with this request I signified my compliance. But the observations made in the Discourse have been so far amplified, that I have deemed it advisable to give them the title now prefixed to them, and to publish them in an altered form. I am not aware, however, that any thing material will be found in the following sections, that was not announced in a form more or less distinct from the pulpit. On the whole, therefore, these thoughts may be taken as a fair average view, of the opinions and feelings of the well-informed and truly decided body of Protestant Nonconformists who concurred in urging that they should be printed; and as a tolerably certain indication, of the views entertained by the same class of persons through the kingdom.

My Lord, I have not been inobservant of the promptitude, vigour, and directness, by which your mind is characterised, and can readily conceive that before proceeding thus far, you have been about to ask, and with some impatience—what is all this to *me*? With what possible propriety am I addressed on a subject of this nature? With your permission I will answer these questions, and so briefly as not to make any large demand on the time which you know so well how to employ. This I am also anxious to do, under the influence of every sentiment of respect due to your high character and station. Your Lordship's mind is not of an order to be deemed incapable of releasing itself in any degree from the force of prejudice; and is still further removed, as I am willing to believe, from that want of ingenuousness which has too often placed the most powerful intellects in wilful alliance with error.

Still, my Lord, it is inseparable from the station which you fill, that you should be in almost ceaseless connexion with sources of communication, tending to produce and strengthen every kind of prejudice against Dissenters; and never has misrepresentation, with regard to persons of that

class, been more rife than at this moment. The public press, political and religious, is tainted, in this respect, as to the core; and there are large sections of society which too nearly resemble it. My impression is, that you, my Lord, are not governed by the indiscriminate reckless enmity with which we have to contend in many quarters; that you are willing rather, if respectfully invited to the subject, to give its full weight to whatever may be offered in behalf of our principles or proceedings as Dissenters; and it is in consequence of this impression that I have ventured to submit the following thoughts to your consideration, and presume in this place to detain your attention for the space of a few pages.

But let me not be mistaken. Our position, as Dissenters, leaves us little to hope or fear from the Established Church. As a Church, our Episcopalian brethren have nothing to bestow, that we are at liberty to accept; and could we conceive of them as animated by the most determined hostility against us, there would be nothing even in such an aspect of affairs to make us greatly afraid. Our fathers, who knew but too well what such things mean, knew also how to make evils of that descrip-

tion subservient to good; and their descendants would not be found wanting in the day of trial. But we expect nothing of this kind; the sound part of the Church of England would be the first to deplore it; and every pious Dissenter earnestly prays for something far different. I am confident that I express the feeling of the great majority of my brethren, when I say, that for the credit of our common Christianity, and not from any fear about the security or advancement of our interest as Dissenters, I am deeply anxious to see the return of a calmer habit of thought, and of a more christian temper on both sides.

Your Lordship, then, has no doubt heard very much of late concerning the restless spirit, and evil designs, of the Dissenters—enough to keep these persons constantly before you, as an ungrateful body of people, who, while sheltered by the favour of a most tolerant Establishment, have become intent—from very wantonness—on doing every kind of injury to that establishment, looking, in fact, to nothing less than its utter spoliation and overthrow. But is it unquestionable, my Lord, that the spirit of the Church of England towards Dissenters, has been on all occasions so

lenient and kindly as those persons represent? Is it quite certain also, that Dissenters, as a body, are really chargeable with all the delinquency which the hosts of their enemies impute to them?

With regard to the first of these allegations, it describes the past condition of Dissenters in terms singularly at variance with fact. Is it, for example, to be accounted nothing, that we have found ourselves in the midst of an artificial system, so framed as to remind us at every point, and every moment, of the social inferiority to which we were subject, on account of our scruples in matters of religion,—scruples, which we knew to be sincere and honourable? Is it nothing, that for this cause our own Protestant brethren should have possessed the power of thrusting us at all times into a suspicious distance from royalty and court favour; of placing us at disadvantage in nearly all the avenues which lead to the prizes of public life; and of obliging us to feel in all connexions, public and private, that we are persons of a lower grade than themselves in general estimation? Must we deem it nothing, that this favouritism of the state to one religious party, is, in this manner, a positive injury

done to all who are not included in that favour, and to all whose principles will not suffer them to be included in it? Has it been nothing, that conscientiousness has thus come to be a species of crime, exposing men to an almost omnipresent, and often very formidable amount of punishment? Was it nothing, my Lord, that the Test Act pointed so long at the Dissenter as a man of doubtful character—not to be trusted in any matter that might in the least affect the good of his country? Nothing, that the securities of our property were so long endangered, except as we were prepared to comply with a form of baptism, to which we felt strong religious objections; and that in connecting the sanctities of religion with the institute of marriage, we were so long compelled to go from the services of our own ministers to those of the stranger? Is it nothing even now, that having defrayed the expenses of our own worship, we are subject to constant exaction, in order that we may be made to furnish garniture for the worship preferred by our more wealthy neighbours; and that our ancient seats of learning, while described as belonging to the nation, and existing as vast sources of emolument and

honour, should continue to be accroached to themselves by the men of one religious party?

Nor has it been enough that these grievances should press upon us. How often, within the last twenty years, have we been assailed with every sort of misrepresentation and abuse. It would be easy to collect volumes of passages of this nature from the visitation discourses, and the periodical and general literature of Churchmen, the scorn and contumely of which nothing could exceed, describing us—in the very language of the men who sent our martyred fathers to the place of execution—as not more than “half Englishmen,” because we do not bow the knee to the ecclesiastical supremacy of the crown; and denouncing our religion, not merely as “destroying more souls than it saves,” but as tending *only* to destroy, and as no better than a covert, under which to indulge, if not in the practice of sedition, certainly in all the malign passions considered as leading to such practices! While in regard to learning, the common assumption and language has been, that a people so inherently vulgar, cannot possibly have the least pretension to credit on that ground;

and if proof to the contrary has been sometimes afforded, enough has generally occurred to show how very unwelcome such proof has been. No doubt, my Lord, there are Churchmen who have looked on these things with a regret highly honourable to their candour and generosity; but while the majority have rather seemed to sympathize with all the bitterness and injustice of these proceedings, rarely putting the slightest private or public discountenance upon them, it surely ought not to be matter of surprise if a deep sense of injury on the part of the Dissenter, has sometimes broken forth in strong expressions of resentment.

It is not, assuredly, in your Lordship's nature, nor in the nature of any educated, honourable mind, to look considerately on the condition of a people beset with so many obvious, and so many nameless forms of civil disparagement and wrong, on account of their religion, and then to say of them that they have been wholly without excuse in complaining of grievance, or that they have become justly liable to very heavy censure, if, when the moment for partial redress has seemed to arrive, their desire of change has been found to carry them

somewhat to excess. It is the force of the previous constraint which determines the strength of the rebound. Thrust men into one unnatural extreme, and you prepare them to rush into another, in an opposite direction, on the first opportunity. The elements of insurgency are never so volcanic as when called forth by the rigours of despotism. Dissenters are no exception to this tendency in human nature.

If, indeed, we are to consider their vocation to have been, that they should exemplify a perfect intelligence and rectitude in our weak and disordered world, it must be confessed they have not always appeared in their proper character. In that case, they should have looked so comprehensively, and so profoundly, on the numerous and momentous questions which have recently come into debate, as thoroughly to have understood them. They should have made large allowance for the force of prejudice, and the feeling of interest, in connexion with ancient and opulent institutions. They should have remembered how much there is in the unavoidable weakness of human nature that may lead to self-deception, even in the case of the well-meaning. They should have been careful to

acquaint themselves with all the good, as well as the evil, included in the existing order of things, and should have looked to the contingent injuries which changes apparently the most desirable are often found to carry along with them. If precluded from their place as citizens, and scoffed upon and put down in not a few connexions as religionists, they should have known how to be silent under such treatment, or how to have uttered the language of complaint, influenced more by pity and forbearance than by resentment. And within the last few years especially, they should, perhaps, have been content with calm and dignified efforts to obtain a removal of their more immediate grievances; and if they had altogether failed in their object, as in that case they probably would, they should have known how to bear such disappointments, so as not to be greatly distressed by them, and so as to have been capable of returning good for evil, and blessing for cursing! But, my Lord, does it become our opponents, in the greater part of whom this "meekness of wisdom" has been so lamentably wanting, to demand it from others upon a scale of this sort? Having acted the firebrand during so many long years, is it seemly in these persons to affect astonishment, and a kind of

horror, on seeing that Dissenters are not always engaged in the offices of the peacemaker? Can it be a true charity that is found thus capable of hoping all things on one side, and incapable of bearing with the usual indications of human infirmity on the other? True, my Lord, we are imperfect beings; we have not always spoken wisely, nor acted wisely; but of this I am confident, that from the beginning to this day, we have been a people "more sinned against than sinning."

The great charge against us, so far as I am able to ascertain, is, that we are aiming at nothing less than the destruction of the Established Church. Now it is not denied that the principles of Congregationalism are opposed to the existence of any civil establishment of Christianity. But it is one thing to be persuaded that a nation might have chosen a wiser course than it has done, and another to fall into a justly censurable mode of proceeding, in order to correct a prevalent error. It may be strictly lawful that there should be no Established Church; but in the state of society existing in England it may be far from expedient. The whole question, though truly one of principle, is also one

to be determined, in a great degree, by circumstances. While the social system of England shall be what it is, and while the prevalent feeling in favour of an Established Church shall be what it is, there ought, as I conceive, to be such a church. The Dissenter may say, that the State, in this respect, is exercising a power which it ought not to have assumed; but so long as the State is not so persuaded, it should not be expected to relinquish the policy which has naturally resulted from its different consciousness of duty. Principle, on this great question, may be of as much moment to the Churchman as to the Dissenter. And if there are Dissenters, who, having looked to the monarchy and to the court of England; and to the prepossessions, on this subject, of the persons who constitute the upper, and even the lower House of Parliament; and have expected to see these parties concur in any thing approaching toward an extinction of the State Church, such expectation must surely have been indulged in some of those delusive moments when the passions do not allow the understanding to perform its proper office. But, my Lord, if there are circumstances which seem to require that there should be an Established Church, it should be remembered that there are other

circumstances which demand, and not at all less imperatively, that it should be one of moderate pretensions. If there be a majority to combine in support of such a church, there is a minority dissenting from it, and one sufficiently powerful to render it necessary that the Endowed Communion should bear their faculties meekly. Were the Church of England to become so far intolerant as to disgust the liberal portion of her members, and to occasion their withdrawment in any great number to the side of Dissent, her days, secure as she may now seem, might not be many.

On the whole, my Lord, my own humble conviction in regard to the Church of England, and that, as I believe, of Dissenters generally, is, not that she should be demolished, or despoiled, but that she should be regarded as pertaining to the religion of the majority, according to the real state of things in England, and not as embodying the religion of the nation, according to the perfect theory of an Ecclesiastical Establishment, as carried out in Portugal or Spain; that on this ground, such a period should be put to the ecclesiastical favouritism of the State, as may prevent any further grants of public money or exclusive privilege to the Endowed

Church; and that in regard to the few matters which as Dissenters we still feel to be vexatious indications of civil inferiority in consequence of our religious preferences, we should continue to seek a removal of them until it be obtained.

In conclusion, my Lord, I make my appeal to your known intelligence, and to your christian candour and urbanity, on this subject. Is there any thing in the principles, or in the proceedings of our denomination, as thus viewed, to render it necessary that there should be this bitter hostility between the Churchman and the Dissenter—this envenomed partizanship, which is everywhere strengthening the scepticism of the Infidel, giving point to the sarcasms of the profligate, perplexing the ingenuous inquirer, and afflicting the heart of the most devout persons in every christian communion? Bear with me, my Lord, in reminding you of the high responsibility which attaches, in this respect, to persons holding a rank like that to which you are raised. If the great are not popular and powerful, it is in general because they do not merit such distinction. Slight favour from them is almost sure to fall with effect on the mass.

Moderate effort on the part of your Lordship might do much toward abating the asperities of party, and producing a more christian-like habit of mind among those who profess to be alike Christians. It may be, that this attempt to correct your probable misconceptions with regard to the real object of Dissenters, and to draw your fair-minded attention to their character and history, will be without any apparent effect. It may not appear well to place your opponents in the wrong, by your own different example, should they persist in a course of uncharitableness. It may still be our lot to find, that nothing is accounted religion which is not found within the pale of the Established Church; that nothing is supposed to be done for the advancement of religion, which is not done by that Church; that the country will be again called upon to augment her exclusive opulence and distinction; that every effort will be made to perpetuate, and not to put away, remaining sources of irritation; in a word, the spirit of the past may survive in the future, and, if so, there will indeed be no prospect of returning concord; those who sigh most for peace will be constrained to subordinate feeling to principle, and the relative position of

parties, in some unforeseen conjuncture of affairs, may become such as the proudest are little prone to expect.

*Τῶ οὐκ ἂν με γένος γε κακὸν καὶ ἀνάλκιδα φάντες,
Μῦθον ἀτιμήσητε πεφασμένον, ὅν κ' εἶπω.*

Nothing, however, can deprive me of the satisfaction I feel, in having attempted, with whatever feebleness, to state the case of my brethren, both among the living and the dead, with fairness; and to present it under some aspects tending to show the harmony that may subsist between the firmest adherence to the principles of Independency, and the large and fervent charity of the Gospel.

I am,

With sincere respect,

Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

ROBERT VAUGHAN.

KENSINGTON,
Feb. 22, 1838.

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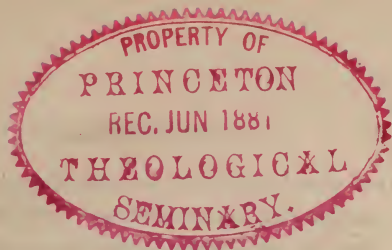
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PAST AND PRESENT STATE
OF
RELIGIOUS PARTIES.

SECTION I.

Influence of Religious Truth on Social Freedom and Improvement,—Effect of success in Particular Studies on the progress of General Knowledge.—The bond of English Congregationalism always one of Principle.—View of the polity so designated.—Extravagant assertions of its opponents.—Testimony of Antiquity to the Independence of the primitive churches.—Prevalence of the Union between Civil and Ecclesiastical Power in the ancient and modern world,—Causes which led to it.—The Relative Position of these powers always Unnatural.—Antiquity and prevalence of usage, no proof of its accordance with the spirit of Christianity.—Early corruption of every thing christian.—Ancient and General customs always based on Supposed Utility.—Real question at issue between the advocates and opponents of Ecclesiastical Establishments,—Should never have led to persecution, or to unfriendly disagreement.—Severity of our Penal Statutes in relation to it.

JESUS CHRIST once said to certain Jews who believed on him, “The truth shall make you free.”* There are two senses in which this emphatic saying is true. We all confess its verity in the sense in which it is commonly understood. We have learnt to regard the doctrine of our Divine Lord as possessing a power, when accompanied by the influence of the Holy Spirit, to free the human mind from the thralldom of error, and to deliver those who

* John viii. 32.

embrace it from the usurped dominion of appetite and passion. To be thus free, is to "be free indeed." But this moral or spiritual liberty in the case of individuals, is not the only kind of freedom resulting from the influence of religious truth. There is a connexion subsisting between the extent in which that truth is diffused among a people, and the measure in which such a community will be taught to approve the things which are equal and humane in the general relations of society. Falsehood, as the offspring of craft and ignorance, can never dispense with the aids of oppression. Its dominion is in darkness, and no effort is so natural to it as that which is designed to preclude the light. But men who are satisfied concerning the truth of their cause, may well challenge discussion, and become the advocates of liberty. Such men only can afford to act on so just and generous a policy. It is true, the principles of social justice, even while aided by favourable circumstances, may sometimes be very long in acquiring that influence over a community to which they are always entitled. But it is not less manifest, that the power connected with "the truth as it is in Jesus," is far from being such as to give an immediate completeness to the work which it is designed to accomplish on human character. In both cases, however, the effect is certain, in proportion to the degree in which the cause is in operation. The progress of truth, in every form, is the progress of the free principle, however much the ignorance and selfish passions of mankind, strengthened, perhaps, by artificial circumstances, may tend, for a time, to impede or divert its natural course of action. It is the case with the several departments of truth, as with all the great objects which discipline the human faculties—there is not only harmony between them, but a kindred principle pervading them, so that the successful

study of any one prepares the way to a more adequate knowledge of others, until the whole circle is brought, by this law of association, under the full light and cognizance of the mind. In this manner the progress of the arts favoured the revival of letters, and both conduced powerfully to the reformation of religion as achieved by Luther. Between all such things there is a constant action and re-action; and while affinities bring them together, combination gives them a power to make free.

In the history and present position of the body of Protestant Dissenters distinguished as holding the principles of Congregationalism, we see an instructive illustration of these remarks. In England, the adoption of this system has always been attended by loss and suffering, particularly under the last of the Tudors, and under the house of Stuart. Its continued existence, accordingly, must be viewed as the effect of a strong conviction *somewhere* in regard to its truth. Consistently with this view of it, we find its voice raised at all times on the side of free discussion and unrestricted liberty; and, though long regarded as a most pestilent heresy on this account, it has remained steadfast in its demands on these points, until "the little one has become a thousand," and myriads who have not imbibed its temper to the full are constrained to do homage to it in part. It is not difficult to trace the steps by which the truth, allied with these generous sentiments, has been rendered so expansive and efficient. The personal responsibility of man in matters of religion, was the great truth proclaimed by the Reformation. By the pious men whose names are conspicuous in the early history of Congregationalism, that truth was not only embraced with much sincerity, but was seen with a clearness long peculiar to themselves in the great results

to which it leads. In this one principle there was a ray of light, which could not be made to bear exclusively on the false authority of popes and conclaves. On the contrary, it fell with no less effect on all kindred forms of ecclesiastical power, and led to the adoption of many other principles, all in harmony with each other, and with the one source from which they were derived. Thus, to be made free from one error, was to be freed from many more which had long existed in natural alliance with it. By the same law, the mind passes from the principles of ecclesiastical to those of civil freedom; and thus viewed, the most feeble and scattered elements of truth, whether natural, moral, or religious, will appear as a prolific seed, the germination of which is in the way of a constant tendency toward an ever-growing freedom.

The religious creed of the churches in England formed upon the Independent or Congregational model, has always included the distinguishing truths of the Gospel; the persons recognised as members of such churches have generally borne the peculiar character described by the inspired writers as that of christian men; while their church polity, the effect of a simple deference to the complete authority of the New Testament, has been a ceaseless manifestation of their scrupulous regard to the rights of their neighbours in all matters civil and religious. Now the effect of the truth avowed in the religious profession of these persons; embodied in this manner in their religious character; and acted upon thus continually in all their relations; has been to deliver them from a state of the most fearful oppression, to place them in their present condition of comparative freedom, and to confer upon them a power to diffuse the elements of religious and social improvement, in no small degree, over the nation

at large. Their views in relation to the doctrines, the precepts, and the institutions of Christianity, have all been more true, as the effect of their wiser and firmer adherence to the one true principle concerning individual responsibility on matters of religion; and the effect of the whole truth embraced by them, has been to augment their numbers, to improve their social position, and to correct and elevate the opinions and sentiments of mankind over a space extending far beyond the circle of their own communion. We thus see the declaration of our blessed Lord verified in regard to our general liberty as men, no less than in regard to our spiritual liberty as Christians—"The truth shall make you free."

My principal object in these pages will be, to exhibit the leading facts in the history of Congregationalism; and to call attention to some of the circumstances most observable in the present condition of the Congregational body as compared with the past. This will be done in the hope of awakening suitable gratitude to God, who, in his providence, has not only granted liberty to the captive, but caused the weak to become strong. Nor am I less concerned to prosecute these objects with the consideration and feeling, which, under the divine blessing, may conduce to render us more equal to the peculiar exigencies of the times in which we live, and more capable of uniting a fervent zeal in the cause of truth, with an enlightened charity toward every communion of Christians, and all mankind:—high purposes, it may be said, to have in view, in connexion with so humble a performance. This I admit, but I remember also, that the stream which keeps the wheel in motion, accepts its supplies from the smallest rivulet.

Before we proceed to our main object, it will be proper

to state, in few words, what those principles are, by which Congregationalists are distinguished from other denominations of Christians. The cause which rests upon *men*, will fluctuate, and be of short duration. It is when numbers are brought together by the influence of *principles*, that combination is likely to be perpetuated; and the more the principles which have so operated are imbued with truth, the greater is the probability of continued association, and of progressive power. It is admitted, that men may labour in the cause of social justice, or of religious truth, and be, in some instances, successfully resisted, by the overpowering strength of evil influences. That there should be such occurrences in our world, where error is often so much more acceptable than truth, and wrong so often prevails over right, is not at all surprising. It is much rather wonderful that such events should be *so rare*, and that even when they happen, the good element should so commonly be rather exiled, or suppressed for a time, than utterly destroyed. The bond of Congregationalism has been one of principle from the beginning: its early disciples witnessed the evils of secular interference in the concerns of religion, on a scale to which we are happily strangers. The crown and the mitre, with their courts of Star-chamber and of High-commission, were in league against them. Circumstances thus disposed them to a *rigid search* into the nature and foundation of ecclesiastical power; and the result was, their adoption of those principles from which they derived their distinction as a religious body, and which, after the experience of two centuries, a much more numerous people, both in the old world and in the new, are happy to avow as their own.

The leading principle in this system of polity is, that

every christian church, instituted conformably to the requisitions of the New Testament, is a strictly voluntary association, existing with a view to objects purely religious, and governed by laws and sanctions which are altogether of a spiritual nature, and derived, in the exercise of its own independent judgment, from Holy Scripture. As the object of association, in this case, is strictly moral and religious, so no one can be deemed admissible to it, with any appearance of propriety, who is not a person of moral and religious character. To the magistrate, Congregationalists have always looked for security from civil wrong on account of their religious preferences, so long as these are not acted upon in a manner inconsistent with the duties which men owe to each other in society. This amount of protection is all they have ever solicited, in their religious character, from the state. Each body of Christians thus united by their common profession, is regarded by the Congregationalist as a complete church, independent of all control from the civil power, or from any ecclesiastical power apart from itself. Its province is in no respect to legislate; but to interpret and enforce the law of Christ as contained in the canonical Scriptures—Christ himself being regarded as the only head or king of his church. Brotherly reproof, accordingly, or exclusion from communion in the case of the irreclaimable, are the only censures ever resorted to in a church of this order. It acknowledges but two classes of officers—pastors and deacons;—the former acting as the teachers and spiritual shepherds of the flock; the latter employed in ministering to the temporal wants of the poor from the contributions of the church, and in conducting the temporal affairs belonging to such communities. It will be seen that a regular

ministry is thus recognised; but the church claims the right of choosing its own pastor, and acknowledges its obligation to support the person or persons who thus take the oversight of it, on the ground of the apostolic injunction, "that those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel." It should be added, that while each church is regarded in its separate capacity as a complete church of Christ, and as competent to all the functions proper to such a body, this completeness and independence of particular churches, is not incompatible with any local or general association of such churches with a view to objects relating to their common interest, provided always, that such objects are pursued in such a manner as to leave *each* church in full possession of its own inalienable independence. It is from this constant solicitude to secure to each church a perfect freedom from all foreign legislative control, that the advocates of these views have derived their name as *Independents*,—the word *Congregationalist* having respect, somewhat in the same manner, to the complete church-character of every separate congregation of Christians.

With regard to these leading principles of Congregationalism, its disciples have been, I believe, at all times of one mind; always revering them as sanctioned by the recorded example of inspired men, by their direct injunctions, or by the manifest genius of Christianity. They have been accustomed also to speak of them as wisely adapted to every conceivable state of the church; and as commended by its practice in the earlier and better periods of its history. We must not stop to enter into any discussion concerning the truth or excellence of these principles. An examination of the evidence and reasoning on which they are founded would detain us

long, and leave small space for the consideration of those matters which have been mentioned as forming the principal object of the present publication. But the opponents of our views have indulged of late in an unwonted boldness of assertion on subjects of this nature. They have affected to pity the ignorance of Dissenting authors who contend that Independency is discoverable in ecclesiastical antiquity, and have professed to be much concerned at the credulity of Dissenters generally, in receiving with so little hesitation what they hear affirmed by their oracles on this subject. Nothing, it is said, can be more ill-founded than any such pretension. But we venture to observe that this manner of talking on such a topic is not very ingenuous, and by no means such as we should expect from any man of learning. We must not suppose the persons adverted to ignorant of the fact, that if Congregationalists err in this respect, they err in company with some of the best informed writers on ecclesiastical history that Europe has produced within the last two centuries. During that period, not a few men of this high character have declared the government prevailing in the primitive church to have been essentially what Congregationalists affirm it to have been. Our leading principle—in which nearly all the rest may be said to have their origin—is the strict *independence* of our churches. On this point the learned Mosheim, a Lutheran, affords the following testimony:—"Although all the churches were, in the first age of Christianity, united together in one common bond of faith and love, and were in every respect ready to promote the welfare of each other; yet, with regard to government and internal economy, every individual church considered itself as an independent community, none of them ever looking,

in these respects, beyond the circle of its own members for assistance, or recognising any sort of external influence or authority. Neither in the New Testament, nor in any ancient document whatever, do we find any thing recorded from whence it might be inferred that any of the minor churches were at all dependent on, or looked up for direction to, those of greater magnitude or consequence; on the contrary, several things occur therein, which put it out of all doubt that every one of them enjoyed the same rights. A greater reverence was undoubtedly entertained, during the first ages, for such of the churches as had been long under the immediate instruction of any of the Apostles; but if any one thing be certain, I am persuaded this is—that those churches never possessed the power of governing or controlling the rest.”* Gibbon, speaking of the primitive churches, says, “The societies which were instituted in the cities of the Roman empire, were united only by the ties of faith and charity. Independence and equality formed the basis of their internal constitution.”† The Lord Chancellor King, in his learned work on the Constitution of the Church, assures us, that in primitive times, “every particular church had power to exercise discipline on her own members, without the concurrency of other churches;”‡ and Dr. Barrow, a divine whom the Church of England may well be proud to mention as one of the most learned and honourable of her sons, has stated,

* Commentaries on the Affairs of the Christians, i. 265—267.

† Decline and Fall, ii. 324, 325.

‡ Inquiry into the Constitution of the Primitive Church, 136—138. Ed. 1712. It is said that Lord King lived to confess himself in error on this subject; but I have never met with any good authority for that saying.

that in the early days of Christianity, "every church was settled apart under its own bishops and presbyters, so as independently and separately to manage its own concerns: each was governed by its own head, and had its own laws."* Richard Baxter, reviewing the controversies of his age on points of this nature, writes, "I saw a commendable care of serious holiness and discipline in most of the Independent churches: and I found some episcopal men (as Bishop Usher himself did voluntarily profess his judgment to me) did hold that every bishop was independent as to synods, and that synods were not proper governors of the particular bishops, but only for their concord."†

Now it may be that all these learned persons, and others of the same class who have spoken to the same effect, are mistaken, and that Congregationalists, in thinking with them on this point, and in acting upon this conviction, are both theoretically and practically in error. But while the testimony of such highly competent parties—testimony so manifestly unbiassed and above suspicion—is before us, it surely can be no proof of disgraceful ignorance on matters of ecclesiastical antiquity, to have erred thus in relation to this subject. And be it remembered, that the testimony thus borne to the fact of the *independence* of the primitive churches, is not at all more decisive than might be adduced from similar sources in favour of other leading principles of Congregationalism. Surely it must be no mean weight of evidence which has led such men to embark the credit of their scholarship on the avowal of such opinions, and

* Works, i. 662.

† Life and Times, lib. i. part ii. p. 140.

that, not only without any sinister inducement, but, in most cases, at the cost of consistency. If argument must be offered in support of things as they are, let it be said, that, supposing the first churches to have been independent, it is clear that the polity and worship of the church were so left as to be subject to change according to circumstances in future times; but let it never be said that the practice of Congregationalists is a novelty little more than two centuries old,—and, above all, let not this be said with that haughty dogmatizing temper, which no well-informed modest man can encounter without astonishment and indignation. Independency is not to be put down by bold assertions, however much they may outrage truth or decency. It has done more than maintain its ground, when assailed by weapons from which there was much more to apprehend. It is not said by any Congregationalist, that all the churches of the first three centuries were strictly independent: it is merely said that the system of Independency is that which prevailed in primitive times, and that the departures from it afterwards were unauthorized and injurious, and by no means so early or so general as is sometimes represented.

The great controversy between Congregationalists and their opponents, has always referred to the alleged independence of every properly constituted church, with regard to the power of the state. In their views concerning the authority of the magistrate in relation to all civil affairs, they are not at issue with other portions of the community to which they belong,—giving “honour to whom honour, tribute to whom tribute.” It is only when the bearer of the civil sword, forgetful of his proper office as “a terror to evil doers, and a praise to

those who do well," has shown himself disposed to turn its edge against persons of this character on account of their religious principles and practices, that they have manifested a spirit of active or passive resistance; and they have so done at such times under the solemn impression—whether mistaken or not—that to render the obedience demanded by man, would be to refuse the obedience demanded by God. The early Congregationalists were not without their differences among themselves, some of them being more distinguished by an ardent zeal, than by a broad intelligent charity; and on the point of infant baptism in particular, they were divided, after a while, into two communions. Such disputes, however, did not affect their essential principles as Congregationalists. But those principles were manifestly violated by the slightest intrusion of a foreign legislative power, whether lay or ecclesiastical. Hence it is not to be concealed, that the elements of Congregationalism, and those of an Ecclesiastical Establishment, are directly at variance in all circumstances; and that they will be sure to take the position of antagonist powers, when the only religious worship tolerated is that prescribed by law. Nevertheless, there is no fact in history more observable, than the union which has subsisted between civil and ecclesiastical power, both in the ancient and the modern world. The nature of this union may vary, from the closely interwoven texture of it in the East—amounting, in fact, to an identity between the Church and the State—to that more separate and restricted form in which it exists in Europe, as the effect of the more flexible and free spirit of European institutions. Among us also, this combination of power has varied in its adjustment, from its extreme Popish form, as

in Portugal and Spain, to its extreme Protestant form, as in parts of Germany and of the United Provinces. Everywhere, however, from the earliest time to the age of the Protestant Reformation—if we except the christian church during the first three centuries—we see religion, under all its names and forms, as an affair to be managed by the priest, more or less at the bidding of the magistrate. Nor is revealed religion itself, so far as it is placed before us in the Old Testament, an exception to this course of things. A result so extended and so permanent, must be traced to causes of great prevalence and power. From certain great maxims of ecclesiastical government recorded or suggested in the New Testament, or derived from the unalterable spirit of Christianity, we have learnt to regard this connexion between religion and state polity, though sanctioned in the case of the religion of the Jewish nation, as solemnly precluded from Christianity—the religion designed for all the communities of men to the end of time. But the instructions of the New Testament on this point, have not proved sufficient to control “the course of the world” in relation to it. Men have professed to see more to sanction this union of the spiritual with the temporal in one part of the divine record, than to set it aside in the other; and not a little of the practice of Paganism has been almost everywhere retained, (in other respects as well as in this particular,) on the ground of a real or pretended deference to Judaism.

It is not difficult to understand why the civil power has been thus uniformly concerned to take religion under its keeping and management. Nor is there any thing hard to explain in the conduct of the priesthood. If the former can bestow wealth, the latter has power to give

in exchange. The opulence of the state must depend mainly on the wisdom and power of the magistrate; and the laws of the magistrate will always be effective in proportion as they are strengthened by the sanctions of religion. Thus the union of these parties has been generally viewed as promising mutual advantage to them, as well as good to the community; and accordingly they have everywhere discovered a willingness to enter into this kind of compact.

So far, this proceeding may be pretty well understood. But christian princes, in virtue of the power thus conceded to them, have often shown a most determined purpose in the enforcement of very trivial things in religion, much to the perplexity of persons who have failed to perceive the connexion between such things and others of great importance. In this pertinacity, we see the jealousy of power,—not in regard to those small matters, so much as in relation to the whole of that authority which has enjoined them. Now the aim of that authority is nothing less, than to prescribe the manner in which the subject shall worship the Invisible; the views which he shall entertain concerning the powers above him; and the obedience expected from him at the peril of retribution in a world to come. To speak, after this manner, in every utterance and movement of man when engaged in the solemnities of religious worship; and to regulate, in this manner, his general impressions and conduct, as by the sanctions of futurity, has been a point of great moment with princes who have been distinguished by their love of power. It is a course of proceeding in which the supreme magistrate acts as the interpreter of religion; and to have the power of interpreting a law, is, in most cases, to have not a little of the power of making

it; and in no connexion is law-making so effective, as when our decisions can be made to assume a religious character.

In aiming at this object, the magistrate has, of course, availed himself of the services of the priest; and decency requires that he should seem to adopt the decisions of his ecclesiastical coadjutor, rather than appear to furnish conclusions on such a matter from himself. It has happened, however, that the strength and temper of the civil power has had much more to do with the decrees of the ecclesiastical council, than the learning or the convictions of the persons composing it; and so unwelcome to the more intellectual and ambitious of the christian clergy has been this unnatural position of their order, which obliges them to depend on the sanction of a lay tribunal, as the last resort, for the validity of their conclusions on ecclesiastical differences, that frequent and boisterous disputes arose from this source, long before the time of the Reformation. Nothing, indeed, can, at a first view, appear more unreasonable than this relative condition of these two powers. But so long as the clerical synod shall be content to receive the pay of its lay superior; and so long as it shall not only aim to impose its decisions on the laity in general, but shall look to the authority of the magistrate for the means of doing it; so long must this inversion of the natural order of things be continued. Every such synod is aiming at what is forbidden, and cannot secure its object, except by means which are absurd and unlawful. It is seeking to enslave others; and we do not regret that in order to that end, it is necessary that it should first become a slave itself. These remarks are not more applicable to the conduct of Hildebrand, or of Thomas à Becket, than to the admirers

of the Oxford Tracts, of whom we shall have to speak presently.

The English Reformation did nothing toward dissolving this unnatural adjustment, but tended rather to give it strength and permanence, by adding the direct ecclesiastical power of the Pope, to the secular, and the previous indirect spiritual power of the Crown. And every one must remember how highly this new element of ascendancy was valued by Henry VIII., and particularly by Elizabeth. The former rioted in the license which seemed to be thus ceded to him; and the latter ever spoke of this branch of her authority, as a department of her power which nothing should induce her in one jot to relinquish. It is manifest that the reasoning of Elizabeth on this subject was of that broad and towering description which I have endeavoured to explain. It was not that she cared about the shape of a clergyman's cap, or the colour of a vestment; but care indeed she did as to that place in relation to the church, which enabled her to command the minds as well as the bodies of her subjects; and which, by causing her to reign as mistress in the great and little pertaining to religion, gave her a more uncontrolled supremacy in every thing else.

But it will perhaps be said, that whatever inconsistency or evil may be found inseparable from the existence of this mixed power, the fact of its great prevalence must be admitted as proof that it has its root deeply fixed in the natural working of almost every social system; that its existence, in consequence, is all but unavoidable; and that the duty or expediency of opposing it must, on that account, be exceedingly doubtful. But this is an argument which, if it prove any thing, proves too much. If we should all become supporters of church establish-

ments because Christianity is everywhere known in that form from the fourth century to the age of Luther, then ought we all to go a step further, and become Papists, inasmuch as all the elements, both of superstition and of domination, from which “the man of sin” derived his power, were at work before that period. These elements, indeed, were all expanded and systematized, by slow and imperceptible degrees, in subsequent time ; but they were all *there*, ready to be so wrought upon—monkery and celibacy ; holy oil, holy vestments, and holy water ; the magic power of the sacraments ; the sanctity of relics ; lying miracles, and works of supererogation ; confession, indulgences, and penance, and nearly all the rest. In becoming what we are as sober christian men, we have set at nought the example of the universal church, almost from the age of the Apostles to our own. We have gone up at once to the times of the New Testament, and have determined to unlearn every thing not to be learnt there. And have we not done well in being thus decided and thus bold? But having learnt by so doing to set at nought the terrors of superstition, and having cast off the bands of a haughty priesthood, is it when we come to the question concerning the province of the magistrate in regard to religion that we must begin to do homage to error,—and all, forsooth, because it is very prevalent and has lasted very long? If it be come to this, then let us go out upon the spaces of the past, and learn the *whole* of the lesson it has to teach ; let us cease to be the men we have supposed we were, and let us fall back in all things upon that state of childhood which we have flattered ourselves with having outgrown. But we are not, I presume, disposed to furnish any such exemplification of consistency.

In speaking thus of the compact between the civil magistrate and the ministers of religion, as existing in a heathen and in christian nations, we have not said that this kind of agreement has always been one of pure selfishness, or that its effects on communities have been purely evil. The fact has often been far otherwise. No social institution will ever become general, and continue long, without possessing an intimate connexion with real or supposed utility. But admitting that the pagan magistrate has made the sort of religion at his disposal to be productive of more social good than evil; and that a people with a Christianity provided altogether by the state, are in far better circumstances than a people without any Christianity at all; we are still far enough from seeing our way to the conclusion, that the chief design of our religion is realised when it becomes thus subservient to worldly policy, and that its best condition as a spiritual system is as set forth in state expositions, and as provided for by state enactments.

One thing is indisputable—it was not the will of its all-powerful Author that it should obtain its first hold on mankind by such means; and while it is certain from fact, that he then approved of its being kept apart from all state control, and required that its independent perfectness and efficiency should be thus demonstrated, men have now to follow a dubious process of reasoning, in order to persuade themselves that the same system may be lawfully placed under a control of that nature in these later times. The *fact* shows, that the system may be perfect, apart from any such connexion: the *reasoning* has to show, that it is not damaged of necessity, and very materially, by it.

It should always be borne in mind in discussions on this

subject, that there is no difference of judgment among Christians of any class, in regard to the right and duty of every professedly christian community to provide the means of religious instruction for the people at large. The only point at issue, is one relating to the *manner* in which such communities should proceed to the performance of this imperative service. The Churchman contends, that instruction of this nature, if not provided in *his* manner, will fail to be provided at all; the Dissenter is of another mind, and persuaded that the quantity of the supply on *his* method would be equal, and the quality far better. It must be acknowledged that the question, though relating exclusively to the *mode*, and not at all to the *duty* of furnishing the required supply, is one of great importance. But inasmuch as men equally distinguished by learning, piety, and apparent integrity, have come to strictly opposite conclusions respecting it, there is one further conclusion, in which both parties ought to have been fully agreed—namely, that the point is not one of those on which any amount of supposed error should have been allowed to prevent or disturb the exercises of christian esteem and affection among really devout men,—much less to bring upon supposed offenders, the fines, imprisonments, exile, and death, which have been so often inflicted on them, as the punishment due to such delinquency. As both parties may be equally sincere, and even honest, in adopting their conclusions, there is nothing in the fair discussion of such questions to justify displeasure on either side. And if the dispute should pass from mere discussion to a demand for great public measures, there is even then as little just ground for offence as before, provided those measures are sought by strictly constitutional means.

Should the measures so demanded be of a description not to be brought about except by violence, still it may be, that not one in a thousand of those who desire them have seen them in that light, or would be parties to a single act of violence for the sake of them.

Now it has not been the necessary consequence of the principles of Congregationalism, that it should have stood so long alone in asserting the proper independence of religion with regard to the coercive elements of worldly power. We can conceive of Episcopalianism as being in all respects what Congregationalism has been, except as including *three* orders in the place of *two*; and Presbyterianism, as we all know, may exist, by choice, in a state completely separate from all secular control. But it so happened, that from the age of the Reformation to that of the Commonwealth, it was peculiar to Congregationalists—always meaning by that term the Baptist and Pædo-baptist denominations—to claim exemption from the power of the state in their religious affairs, and to maintain that christian churches should be strictly voluntary associations. From the time of the Commonwealth, the Quakers avowed the same principles, and adhered to them with the spirit of martyrdom. Episcopalians have always clung to the ecclesiastical supremacy of the crown; and such of the Puritans as became Presbyterians of the most sturdy sort, while objecting strongly to certain things which that supremacy was employed to uphold, always professed to regard the power itself with great deference. In fact, to oppose that power of the crown, by speech, by writing, or by acting in independence of it, in the age of Elizabeth, was to be convicted of felony, and even of treason,—her right of sovereignty in the church, being a point no more to be questioned

than her claim to be the head of the state. To bow to the last of these pretensions only, was, in the language of James I., to give the body to the prince, the soul to another, and thus to reject the better half of the dominion which he claimed. How the modest doctrine, thus openly avowed, is to be reconciled with the injunction, "Render under Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's," the Dissenter is at a loss to discover. Happily for all parties, time has destroyed the force of this usurpation, and has limited its exercise among us, in a great degree, to the circle of persons who choose to submit to it, in the modified form in which it now exists.

SECTION II.

Character and sufferings of the early Congregationalists, commonly called Brownists.—Notices of Brown, Thacker, Copping, Greenwood, and Barrow.—Brownist exiles.—Character and history of Robinson of Leyden—the father of English Independency.—His disciple, the Rev. Henry Jacob, forms a Congregational Church in England, on his principles, in 1616.—Depressed condition of Congregationalism previous to the meeting of the Long Parliament.—Progress and power of Independency from that time.—Causes of its ascendancy.—Character of the Independent ministers and churches during that period.—Their noble views on the subject of Religious Liberty.—The part they took against the king considered.—State of parties from the death of the king to the Restoration.—Conduct of the Episcopalian and court party toward the Nonconformists.—Character of the reigns of Charles II. and James II. in regard to religious liberty.—Accession of William and Mary.—The Toleration Act.—Further progress of religious freedom prevented during that reign and the reign of Queen Anne by the old court party.—The Occasional Communion and Schism Bills: their character, and the design of those who supported them.—Happy accession of the House of Hanover.—State of religious parties since that event.—Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians.—Causes of the decline of orthodoxy in the latter body, aptitude of Congregationalism to preserve religious truth, and to perpetuate a truly Christian Ministry.—Answers to objections.

It is not until about the middle of the reign of Elizabeth, that the religious persons in this country, whose principles led them to separate themselves from the Established Church, became so considerable as to attract the notice of the government, and to obtain a place in history. They were then called Brownists or Barrowists—designations derived from two of their leaders. Brown was a clergyman, and educated at Cambridge, a popular preacher, and nearly related to Cecil, the lord treasurer. But his restless and impassioned temper, led

to unsteadiness of principle and disorderly conduct, and he ended his days in obscurity and disgrace as a conformist. His connexions, the sort of ability which he possessed, and his sufferings during some years on account of his principles, made him notorious; and his subsequent conduct disposed the enemies of the Brownists to fasten his name upon them, hoping, it would seem, by that means, to attach the disgrace of the individual to the party by which he was disowned. In 1593, an act was passed which required the Brownists to abjure the realm; and which further declared, that such as should remain beyond a specified time, or return without license from the queen, should suffer death as felons. While the bill which became law in this form was under discussion, Sir Walter Raleigh said, in his place in parliament, that he thought it possible some 20,000 men might be convicted of Brownism; and he demanded to know, in case of their banishment, as the bill proposed, what was to become of their wives and children.* During some years previously, it had been the practice of the government to commit persons of this description to prison, wherever they were found; where they remained, subject, at the pleasure of their persecutors, to every sort of privation and suffering. One of these persons died in Newgate in 1592, and his fellow-prisoners placed the following inscription on his coffin: "This is the corpse of Roger Rippon, a servant of Christ, and her majesty's faithful subject, who is the last of sixteen or seventeen which that great enemy of God, the archbishop of Canterbury, with his high commissioners, have murdered in Newgate within these five years, manifestly for the

* D'Ewe's Journal, 517.

testimony of Jesus Christ."* Beside those who suffered death by the slow and secret torture of imprisonment, and the many whose days were embittered or shortened by exile, were several who perished under the hands of the executioner. Elias Thacker and John Copping thus suffered at Bury St. Edmonds; their crime being, that they had circulated writings which impugned the ecclesiastical supremacy of the crown. This was in 1583, and four years later similar proceedings were instituted against John Greenwood and Henry Barrow. Greenwood was a divine, and had officiated as such among the Brownists; Barrow was a lawyer. Both were convicted of holding principles which bespoke their disaffection to the Established Church; and their avowal of such principles being construed as sedition, they were condemned as felons, and executed. The same fate awaited Penry, another eminent Brownist, whose sentence was founded on his having among his private papers, certain manuscript observations on ecclesiastical affairs, which a jury was instructed to regard as sufficient proof of sedition. Penry was said by some to have been the author of the Mar-prelate tracts; but no evidence to that effect could be adduced against him. All these persons held in substance the principles of Congregationalism; all might have escaped by a disavowal of those principles; but all had learnt to value the testimony of a good conscience as more precious than life. These martyrs all died professing their attachment to the person and government of the queen; and though they belonged to a sect looked upon with jealousy, and even hatred, by the greater part of the Puritans, as well as by the court

* Strype's Annals, iv. No. 90.

clergy, their loyalty and integrity, as evinced in the article of death, produced so strong an impression in their favour, that the queen and the bishops deemed it expedient to abstain from inflicting capital punishment on such offenders in future.

From that time, such of these separatists as were detected, were quietly committed to some neighbouring prison. If they refused to recant, they were left to end their days in confinement, or were banished from the kingdom. Among the Brownist teachers, and those who soon afterwards became distinguished as such, upon whom these severities fell, we may mention Johnson, Smith, Ainsworth, Canne, Robinson, and Jacob, all of whom, with many of their followers, found an asylum in Holland. In 1598, these exiles published an account of their faith and principles, which is sufficiently explanatory of both, and an admirable defence of their proceedings. In 1604, the year after the accession of James I. this work was republished, and addressed to the divines of Oxford and Cambridge, in answer to some censures recently made public by those learned bodies. It is a document which is alone sufficient to show, that the people whose views it represents, were not so unlettered, nor in any respect so contemptible, as their enemies were disposed to insinuate.

Ainsworth and Canne, though better known in our time than some of their colleagues, by means of their biblical labours, were not on the whole in advance of them. Jacob was educated at Oxford, Johnson and Robinson at Cambridge. The last-mentioned person appears to have been in all respects highly estimable. He held a benefice near Yarmouth, which he resigned on conscientious grounds; and having exercised his

ministry in secret for some years, was obliged to abandon his country. He then became pastor of a church consisting of English exiles at Leyden. After he had laboured in that connexion twelve years, a great part of his flock resolved on transporting themselves to America, in the hope of giving perpetuity to their principles in that country, and of forming an asylum there to which the persecuted in England might at any time escape. Two vessels were procured to bear the exiles and their stores to their place of destination. The new colonists amounted to about one hundred and twenty persons; and after receiving much valuable advice, and the tenderest expressions of regard from the lips of their pastor, and having spent a whole night in prayer, they committed themselves to their voyage. Robinson, and such of the church as remained, knelt on the beach, and as their former companions passed over the distant waters, commended them, with a fervour which such circumstances could alone have produced, to Him, who in his time will "execute righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed."

Robinson died in 1626, in the fiftieth year of his age. He was a man of solid learning, of excellent judgment, and though a great sufferer from persecution, which not unfrequently impairs the temper even in the best regulated minds, he lived and died, beloved as much for his amiableness as he was respected for his integrity. Some of the most learned men in the University of Leyden received him to their friendship, and appeared, with many of the Dutch clergy, as attendants at his funeral. In his parting address to those who became pilgrim-fathers in the new world, he expressed his regret that Protestants in general so little understood their prin-

ciples ; the Lutherans halting with Luther, and the Calvinists with Calvin. "This," he says, "is a misery much to be lamented, for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole council of God ; but, were they now living, would be as willing to embrace farther light as that which they first received. I beseech you to remember, it is an article of your church covenant, that you should be ready to receive whatever truth shall be made known to you from the written word of God. But I must here withal exhort you to take care what you receive as truth ; for it is not possible that the christian world should come so lately out of such thick antichristian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once." So admirable was the combination of holy caution and bold enterprising thought, in the character of the man to whom the English Independents of a later period have been accustomed to look as to their founder.

In a work, written in Latin, entitled "A Defence of the People commonly called Brownists," Robinson used the word *independentes*, to denote that independence of foreign control proper to every Congregational church, which has been already explained ; and it is supposed, that from this use of the term, its application to the polity it is now used to designate originated. This term, however, was not known as the designation of a religious body until the time of the civil war. The system of Robinson varied, in some respects, from that of the Brownists, as the effect apparently of his greater intelligence and moderation.

Jacob embraced all the views of Robinson, and to him belongs the distinction of forming the first Congregational church in England — that church which we see per-

petuated in the body of Christians who are now united in the fellowship of the Gospel in Union Street Chapel, Southwark. The return of Mr. Jacob to England, and the formation of the first Independent church by his means, belong to the year 1616. On that solemn occasion, the minister and the people appointed a day for fasting and prayer. After the devotional services, each person present made audible confession of faith in Jesus Christ; and then, standing together, they joined hands, and "solemnly covenanted with each other, in the presence of Almighty God, to walk together in all God's ways and ordinances, according as he had already revealed, or should further make known to them." Mr. Jacob was then chosen pastor by the suffrage of the brotherhood, and deacons were appointed by the imposition of hands.* But this little band was thrown on evil times. Until the meeting of the Long Parliament in 1640, those who worshipped apart from the Established Church were indebted for their safety in some measure to the unsettled nature of public affairs, but still more to the secrecy of their movements.

With the meeting of Parliament in 1640 fell the power of the ruling clergy. Puritanism threw off the yoke which had been so long fastened upon it; and Independents and Baptists came forth from their concealments at home, and returned in considerable numbers from abroad. The history of Congregationalism from this time to the Restoration, is a subject of which it is impossible to treat with any tolerable effect in a brief space. It soon found its advocates in the senate; and in the course of two or three years, it was embraced by

* Research concerning the most ancient Congregational Church in England. By B. Hanbury. Pp. 7, 8.

the largest and much the most efficient portion of the army at the disposal of the Parliament. Before the masculine powers displayed by these men, both in council and in the field,—the pride of the ambitious churchman, the finesse of the silken courtier, and the courage of the chivalrous cavalier, all were humbled to the dust! And when all the force that could be brought against them in the cause, as they believed, of an intolerant hierarchy and an arbitrary government, was scattered and subdued, and Presbyterianism in the two kingdoms betrayed a disposition to go up into the place of prelacy, and to lord it there too much as other lords had done before, then these same men humbled Presbyterianism, south and north, as they had humbled the power which preceded it. War is ever to be deplored, and above all, civil war; but if the sword must be unsheathed, it is well to see it turn the scale on the side of the injured.

The number of religious persons in that age who professed to belong to the sect of the Independents, was never so considerable, apart from the army, as to account for the impression made upon the times by this party. But what they wanted in that respect, was supplied, in part, by the large and various body of persons who acted with them, for the sake of those general principles of liberty to which they were known to be attached, and not from any real sympathy with their religious sentiments; and in part also, by the greater intelligence, and more practical sort of ability, which they brought to the maintenance of their cause, both as statesmen and soldiers. They had suffered more than any other class of persons, and were prepared to attempt more in order to prevent a recurrence of the same evils.

They saw more to be at stake, and were willing to hazard more with a view to protection.

In the Assembly of Divines, the Independent ministers known by the name of the "dissenting brethren" never exceeded twelve; "but these," says Dr. Lingard, "were veteran disputants—eager, fearless, and persevering, whose attachments to their favourite doctrines had been riveted by persecution and exile, and who had not escaped from the intolerance of one church, to submit tamely to the control of another."* Bailey, the delegated champion of Presbyterianism in that assembly on the part of Scotland, writing to his brethren in that country, says of these Independent ministers, "Truly they speak much, and exceedingly well—if their cause were good; the men have plenty of learning, wit, eloquence, and above all, boldness and stiffness to make it out."† Clarendon also describes the Independents as more learned and reasonable than the Presbyterians, and their congregations as including "some of the most substantial and wealthy citizens, as well as others of better condition," though less numerous than the other sect. Even Baxter, whose weak point was a horror of sects, and particularly of the Baptists and Independents, admits that the ministers of the latter denomination were in general, "learned, discreet, and godly men, fit to be serviceable to the church;" and speaks of their church proceedings as showing "a commendable care of serious holiness and discipline."‡ The dissenting brethren in the assembly did not hesitate to avow that the magistrate is bound to abstain from putting "the least discourtesy on any man, Jew, Turk, Papist, Socinian, or whatever,

* History of England. x. 274.

† Letters. i. 436.

‡ Life and Times. Lib. i. Part ii. p. 140.

for his religion.”* It required a long interval to abate the terror which the first announcement of this noble truth excited both among Presbyterians and Episcopalians. It was, nevertheless, a *truth*, and a truth, as we this day feel, preeminently powerful to make free!

The great crime laid to the charge of this party, is the death of the king. The Independents, however, were not all agreed in regard to that measure, nor were they by any means alone in bringing it to pass. Sir Harry Vane, their leader in parliament, was not the only distinguished man of their party opposed to it. By this time, the objects of the war, and the complexion of the army, had undergone a material change; so much so, that it may be doubted whether the majority of those who were most concerned in sealing the fate of the king, were persons making any pretension to religious character; and, what is more, from the information we possess as to the manner in which Colonel Hutchinson proceeded to perform his part in that sad tragedy, it is manifest that a man might have approved of bringing Charles the First to the block, and still be, in other respects, an enlightened patriot, and a devout Christian.†

* Baillie. ii. 18.

† “As for Mr. Hutchinson,” says his noble-minded consort, “although he was very much confirmed in his judgment concerning the cause, yet being here called to an extraordinary action, whereof many were of several minds, he addressed himself to God by prayer, desiring the Lord, that if through any human frailty he were led into any error or false opinion in those great transactions, he would open his eyes, and not suffer him to proceed, but that he would confirm his spirit in the truth, and lead him by a right enlightened conscience; and finding no check, but a confirmation in his conscience, that it was his duty to act as he did, upon serious debate, both privately, and in his addresses to God, and in conferences with conscientious, upright, and unbiassed persons, proceeded to sign the sentence against the

Nor was the proceeding itself by any means so morally simple as some men would lead the unwary to suppose. It was, in my judgment, an error, and a crime, but a crime which a multitude of circumstances served to extenuate; and one of which no man can judge wisely, except as those circumstances shall have been all considerably weighed—a task which the superficial will be sure to leave unperformed.

During the Commonwealth and the Protectorate, liberty, civil and religious, was conceded, on the whole, to as great an extent as was compatible with the safety of the existing government. Presbyterianism was the established religion; but Congregationalism was tolerated in the church, in the universities, and elsewhere.

king.—Although he did not then believe, but it might one day come to be again disputed among men, yet both he and others thought they could not refuse it without giving up the people of God, whom they had led forth and engaged themselves unto by the oath of God, into the hands of God's and their enemies; and therefore he cast himself upon God's protection, acting according to the dictates of a conscience, which he had sought the Lord to guide; and accordingly the Lord did signalize his favour afterwards to him."—*Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson*. ii. 158. And whatever may be thought of the following character which this writer has given of Charles the First, it is sufficient for my purpose that such views were really entertained concerning him by some of the most religious and honourably disposed persons among the party opposed to him. "The example of the French king was propounded to him, and he thought himself no monarch, so long as his will was confined to the bounds of any law; but knowing that the people of England were not pliable to an arbitrary rule, he plotted to subdue them to his yoke by a foreign force, and, till he could effect it, made no conscience of granting any thing to the people, which he resolved should not oblige him longer than it served his turn; for he was a prince that had nothing of faith or truth or justice or generosity in him. He was the most obstinate person in his selfwill that ever was, and so bent upon being an absolute uncontrollable sovereign, that he was resolved to be such a king or none."—*Ibid.* i. 129.

We can now only conjecture as to what might have been the fate or influence of this system, if the delegated ministers and laymen who constituted the Savoy assembly, in 1658, had been permitted by Providence to add to their general declaration concerning the faith and order of their body, the further measures which they contemplated, with a view to its more organized existence, and efficient operation. That assembly included representatives from about a hundred Congregational churches. But the death of Cromwell, while these matters were in progress, was followed by the overthrow of his wise and magnanimous policy, and by a return of all the evils which his sagacity had foretold. The Presbyterians, regaining their ascendancy, lost no time in joining with the old royalists in restoring the exiled family; and this they did, in a manner which demonstrated that, as a body, they were not to be taught even by the lessons of experience.

Charles the Second would have tolerated both Presbyterians and Congregationalists, partly from an indifference to both, and partly in consequence of some regard for his declaration on that subject from Breda; but much more from the hope of being able to make such a measure subservient to the toleration of the Catholics, —the convenient faith of that people having become his own. But the bishops, with Clarendon at their head, were determined from the first upon a very different course. The policy of this party at that memorable juncture may be stated in few words. It was to secure, in the first place, every possible advantage by delay, and by making grave pretences to a spirit of conciliation; and then, as soon as matters should be matured for such a course of proceeding, to shut up the whole body of

nonconformists to the alternative, of either giving up their livings, or retaining them with such manifest inconsistency, as could not fail to deprive them of their character. They shall become beggars or knaves, men without substance or men without reputation,—was the amiable and honourable decision of that party who, only a few short months before, had poured the oil of flattery on Presbyterian susceptibility with no sparing hand. The good easy men who had been won over by such means, fully believing the promises that were made to them, now gazed on their opponents with wonder and dismay—but it was only to find insult added to treachery. On St. Bartholomew day, accordingly, nearly two thousand beneficed clergymen resigned their livings, rather than hold them in violation of their avowed conscientious principles: thus was there excluded from the Established Church, in one day, an amount of piety, which it has required, as we shall presently see, the labours of nearly two centuries to replace.

But from this time, where are we to find the principles of Congregationalism? During almost thirty long years we have to look for them as a sort of under-current in the stream and working of human affairs, rising only at times and very partially to the surface. What the principles were that became ascendant in the place of them, we may infer from the Conventicle Act, which declared all persons presuming to worship God in any other manner than the law prescribed, liable to fine, or imprisonment; which punished the third offence of that nature with banishment; and made the return of a nonconformist exile, without permission, capital. We may look also, for the same object, to the Five-Mile Act, which banished the nonconformist clergy to that distance

from every corporate town, and forbade their acting as schoolmasters, unless prepared to take the oath of passive obedience and non-resistance. Nor must we forget the Test Act, which excluded all persons who scrupled to take the sacrament of the Lord's Supper according to the rubric of the Church of England, from holding any place of civil trust.

Throughout that dark and troubled period, we find the nonconformists alternately caressed and insulted; flattered to-day, only to be deceived to-morrow; indulged at one season by a suspension of the law, and oppressed at another under colour of it, as happened best to suit the selfish purposes of the sovereign, or of the factions of the hour. From the preface to De Laun's "Plea for the Nonconformists," we learn that the author of that work was regarded as one of more than eight thousand persons, who, during the reign of Charles II., had died in the confinement to which they were subject, as the penalty of dissenting from the worship of the Established Church. And if the report which has reached us, concerning the names of sufferers of this class, as collected by Mr. Jeremiah White, may be relied upon, the number mentioned as having died in prison, includes not a sixth part of those who suffered, more or less, from the same cause. It is less difficult to believe the substance of these reports, incredible as they may happily seem to us in these better times, inasmuch as proceedings of this extended and merciless description are ascertained in the instance of the Quakers, soon after the Restoration;*—so covered was the land with that class

* "Now were the prisons everywhere filled with Friends, and others, in city and country; and the ports were so laid for searching of letters, that none could pass unsearched. Yet we heard of

of men, who, being placed in exclusive possession of the civil power, were prepared to wield it to the purposes of religious intolerance, by setting up a sort of Inquisition in almost every city and town through the kingdom.

But the happy day which witnessed the fall of the last of the Stuarts, witnessed the end of the enactments which led to these barbarous proceedings. The Conventicle Act and the Five-Mile Act, gave place to the Act of Toleration. The gratitude and joy of the nonconformists of all sects under this change were abundant, and their consequent attachment to the throne of William and Mary was most ardent. William was not ignorant of this fact, and would gladly have enlarged their well-merited liberty by repealing the Test Act, and by some other arrangements. But it soon became evident that the king was much in advance of the parliament, and of the majority of his new subjects, in his views on such matters; and during his reign, and that of his successor, it was with the utmost difficulty, and not without the manifest interposition of Providence in its favour, that the Toleration Act was retained. The supposed provisions of that act were narrowed very materially by the bills on Occasional Conformity and Schism, which were

several thousands of our friends, that were cast into prison in several places throughout the nation; and Margaret Fell carried an account of them to the king and council. The next week we had an account of several thousands more that were sent into prison, and she went and laid also them before the king and the council. They wondered how we could have such intelligence. But in the deep sense I had of the sufferings our friends underwent, I was moved to send them a word of consolation, and to put them upon sending up their sufferings."—*Fox's Journal*, i. 560. In November 1660, four hundred men and women were "in close holes and prisons" about London.—*Ibid.* 557.

carried toward the close of this period. And supported as those measures were by Church mobs in London, and in many parts of the country, who not only insulted the persons, but destroyed the meeting-houses of the non-conformists, there is only too much reason to think, that had not the death of Queen Anne prepared the way for the accession of the house of Brunswick and a liberal government, the Toleration Act itself would have shared the fate of the Edict of Nantz.

Many of the Presbyterian nonconformists had been accustomed to commune at the altars of the Established Church from the time of the Restoration, and were in consequence qualified, even by the provisions of the Test Act, to hold civil offices. The Occasional-Communion Bill was framed to exclude these persons from all such trusts. The Schism Bill restricted the work of education to certificated churchmen, who were never to be seen in a conventicle, under severe penalties. Dissenters were thus shut up to the alternative of bringing up their children without the advantages of a public education, or of sending them to receive instruction from parties who, from inclination and circumstances, would be commonly disposed to imbue their general instruction with sectarian prejudice. The clergy alone could appoint these persons to their office; and the object of the bill was plainly to enfeeble and crush the body against which it was directed—their known intelligence having tended to accomplish in their favour, what their numbers alone could never have achieved. These measures readily secured large majorities in the Commons, composed as that house then was, of persons described by Bishop Burnet as belonging to a gentry the most ignorant in Europe. The far better spirit of the Lords was opposed

with success, during more than seven years, to the first of these bills. Both, however, speedily passed, when the queen placed the weight of government in the hands of the enemies of freedom—a party to which she was naturally much inclined, being the daughter of James the Second, and the grand-daughter of Lord Clarendon. Bolingbroke, who took the lead in these proceedings, was well known to be an infidel; but his High-church friends forgot his infidelity in their admiration of his intolerance.

If the nonconformists had good reason to be attached to the throne of William and Mary, they had scarcely less cause to rejoice in the accession of the house of Hanover. If William the Third gave them the Toleration Act in the place of the Conventicle and Five-Mile Acts, George the First secured to them their liberty of worship, unfettered by the iniquitous provisions of the Occasional-Communion and Schism Bills. With the accession of the present royal family to our throne, the friends of popular freedom and of religious liberty were recalled to office; and as no body of men in the land has had greater cause to cherish a spirit of loyalty toward the house of Brunswick than Protestant Dissenters, so none have excelled them in that feeling.

It may be worthy of remark, that the privilege conferred—or, we should rather say, the right secured, by the Toleration Act, was earnestly solicited by the Rev. Henry Jacob, the pastor of the church now assembling in Union Street, Southwark, from James I. The petition in which he pleaded for this liberty, may be still seen annexed to one of his publications. From the period when this great object was realized, to the time in which we live, Congregationalism has made steady

progress in all parts of the kingdom, everywhere retaining its hold on the "faith once delivered to the saints,"—Watts and Doddridge entering into the labours of Owen and Howe. The course of our Baptist brethren, if we except a few of the General Baptist denomination, has been upon the whole equally honourable to them. Would we could speak to the same effect of the Presbyterians. From the age of Elizabeth to the Restoration, the ministers of that denomination were distinguished by their sound views of religious doctrine, by holiness of life, by great purity of manners, by the zeal which they manifested for the diffusion of religious truth, and by the maintenance of a high spirit of loyalty, with a decided attachment to civil freedom. Their religious intolerance was their great fault. In this respect they knew not how to concede to others, what they demanded for themselves. After the Restoration they became more moderate, and learnt by degrees to give up all expectation, and, we should perhaps say, all desire, to see their polity established in the manner for which their predecessors had contended. It would have been well had they stopped at this point. But at no great distance of time from the passing of the Toleration Act, the party which had come forth from hot wars, maintained for more than a hundred years, against popery and prelacy on one hand, and independency and sectarianism on the other, is seen falling with rapidity from its steadfastness on points of much greater moment than any questions of polity or discipline. The morals of the schools take the place of the cross of Christ; the rough Covenanter, not to be moved by argument or entreaty, becomes the smooth philosophical believer; and English Presbyterianism, in

consequence, which once seemed to take half the kingdom along with it, becomes an affair confined to one of the most diminutive of modern sects. Even Methodism, which came upon society like an influence destined to move every thing from its old course and position, came without effect on this once powerful body of professors. Congregationalism has profited largely by this new influence, and the Church of England not less so; but English Presbyterianism, the old antagonist of both, dozing, in the manner incident to age and infirmity, has hardly seemed to be aware of the approach of this novel power, though reducing its house more and more to ruin about it every day.

Why this declension should have taken place thus widely in connexion with Presbyterianism, and be almost unknown in connexion with Congregationalism, is a question deserving some consideration. The Presbyterians, during some time after the Revolution, were much the most numerous and wealthy body among the dissenters, and included of course the larger proportion of educated nonconformists. Their places of worship also, were the most considerable in regard to numbers and endowments. The temptation to religious indifference, so common when external difficulties subside, was stronger in the case of these persons, from their more easy circumstances; and, at the same time, there was a peculiarity in Presbyterianism which led the people to vest high powers in certain officers chosen from among themselves, powers which in great part should not have been thus delegated; and the class of persons most liable to the sort of defection adverted to, were generally raised to these responsible trusts. In the admission of communicants, in all negotiations with ministers, and especially in the management of the

property belonging to the interest, the influence of these functionaries was often such as to enable them to continue a ministry among them, which even the majority were known to disapprove. In the disputes which arose from this cause, if numbers were on one side, strength was generally on the other, and the dissatisfied commonly withdrew to other communions. It is true, Presbyterianism may be so guarded as to be protected against this tendency toward the evils of oligarchy; but dangers of this nature are inseparable from it. These wealthy elders and trustees soon melted away, for the greater part, into the Established Church; and those who remained, have succeeded in giving a sort of perpetuity to an expiring cause principally by means of funds which the piety of former generations bequeathed to very different purposes. Had the authority of the people in those churches been such as Congregationalism would have conferred upon them, and had they acted upon that authority, such results would not have appeared. Arianism, or Socinianism, might have reached to some of their ministers, and to small minorities among themselves, but the root and substance of their churches would have remained, and have been flourishing at this day.

It is indeed a fact, that in America, Unitarianism has made its appearance in churches of the Congregational order. But it has so done, in part as the effect of the covert process by which it has stolen its way along: in part also by resting itself in that country, as in our own, on the mal-appropriation of endowments: and above all, as the consequence of a very defective exercise, on the part of the people, of the rights which pertained to them. That community of divinely-taught persons,

—or, in other words, that “congregation of faithful men,” which we intend by the scriptural use of the term *church*,—is “the pillar and ground of truth.” It has revealed wisdom as its sacred deposit. For the preservation of that wisdom, and the diffusion of it by means of a competent ministry, it is exclusively, and beyond every thing, responsible. Against this church the gates of hell shall not prevail; to this community only can it belong to understand what is proper to the character of a christian ministry; and from this source, and under this authority, that ministry must proceed, if it is to have any certain existence in the world. Every other medium of supply must be more or less defective. It may send forth good men, but they will make their appearance as by chance, and as exceptions; not with any moral certainty, as the effect of a sufficient rule. So rare will they be, that when they come the pious will always look upon them as a god-send. This truth was but imperfectly understood, and still more imperfectly carried out by the body of the laity among the English Presbyterians; and in consequence, error could gain admission, and keep its footing among them, as it could not elsewhere. It is not hazarding much to affirm, that if a once orthodox church has ever been convened, in order that it might express its approval of heterodox opinions, this has not been done until the services of the preacher have so far thinned the pews, as to make the experiment quite safe.

But we must bring this view of the progress of Congregationalism, and of the struggles of religious parties in past times, from which its history is inseparable, to a close. My endeavour has been to make a true report; remembering that the precept, “Thou shalt not bear

false witness against thy neighbour," applies to the dead no less than the living, and to bodies of men as well as to individuals. In the limits to which I have restricted myself, it is not possible that I should protect the statements I have made from misrepresentation, by bringing forth all the authorities or reasonings on which they are founded: but being fully satisfied that the views of by-gone contests which I have presented are correct, I have stated them freely. It is not improbable, however, that persons accustomed to look on these subjects through the medium of one class of writers only, may be little pleased with the general representation now made. It may be said to me, "You know, or at least ought to know, that it was the law, which in the time of Elizabeth made the conduct of the Brownists seditious and treasonable; and that so long as a denial of the queen's ecclesiastical supremacy was deemed a capital offence in the instance of the Catholic, an exception could not with decency be made in favour of the Protestant offending against the same statute. And with regard to the tolerant spirit which you attribute to Congregationalism, did it not concur, as soon as it became powerful, in putting down Episcopacy, in proscribing the liturgy, and in depriving multitudes of clergymen of their livings, as the punishment of their conscientious loyalty?" These, and such like, are the partial and indiscriminate views which the educated classes in this country have been too commonly taught to entertain with regard to questions of this nature in our history.

But would it not be well in such persons to bear in mind, that if the statute of Elizabeth referred to was so constructed as to identify dissent on a point of religion with sedition in the state, it was principally because the

queen, and those who acted under her direction, would have it so? * Would it not be well also for such persons seriously to ask themselves whether decency did not require that a difference *should* be made, between the Catholic and the Protestant offender against the queen's ecclesiastical supremacy; seeing that the former opposed that supremacy from being in alliance with a foreign priest who laid claim to it, and often with the Catholic powers as supporters of that pretension; while the latter did so in favour of the supposed claims of the Divine Redeemer, and in the exercise of a stronger hostility to Romanism, than was felt by the men of any other party in the nation? Can it be suspected that the queen and the prelates, had they been inclined to make an exception in the case of the latter class of offenders, would have been wanting in the ability to do so? And with regard to the conduct of the Independents in power, or, more properly, to that of Cromwell, who became strong in their strength, it is conceded by writers accounted the greatest enemies to the memory of that extraordinary man, that "he would have governed constitutionally, mildly, mercifully, liberally, if he could have followed the impulses of his own heart, and the wishes of his better mind:" and that nothing but "self-preservation compelled him to a severe and suspicious system." † Cromwell was the head of a party, which became ascendant after the state had been divided into two hostile factions, each incapable of trusting the other; so that adjustment was impossible, and nothing remained but victory for one side, and subjection to the other: and

* D'Ewe's Journal, 519.

† Quarterly Review, xxv. 345-6.

the man is a sorry student of history, who can expect to see a government of mild and equal laws following immediately on such a state of things. It is admitted, that the framework of the hierarchy was broken down, and that the use of the liturgy, if in some degree connived at, was not tolerated; but the party which always maintained that the magistrate should forbear "to put discourtesy on any man, whether Jew or Turk, or whatever, on account of his religion," could not have manifested this opposition to Episcopacy and the liturgy, on their own account. These things were indeed peculiarly obnoxious, as tending to perpetuate the memory of former wrongs. It is certain, however, that they were not suppressed for that reason, but in consequence of the political disaffection, which, after many experiments, was found to be inseparable from them.* On the ejecting of the royalist clergy from their livings, if the testimony of Richard Baxter on this point will be admitted,—and a more competent or honest witness in relation to it could not be adduced,—it may be safely believed, that the instances of that kind of hardship,—or, we would rather say, of deep wrong,—were exceedingly rare.† But when persons of this description

* Bishop Kennet says, "It is certain the Protector was for liberty, and the utmost latitude to all parties, so far as consisted with the peace and safety of his person and government; and even the prejudice he had against the episcopal party was more for their being royalists, than for their being of the good old Church.—Dr. Gunning, afterwards bishop of Ely, kept a conventicle in London, in as open a manner as Dissenters did after the toleration, and so did several other episcopal divines."—*Complete History of England*. iii. 223.

† "Because this assembly of triers is most heavily accused and reproached by some men, I shall speak the truth of them, and suppose my word will be taken, because most of them took me for one

chose to employ the influence of their station in the church, to strengthen and spread hostility against the powers of the state, the times were so unsettled and perilous, as to render a quiet tolerance of such proceedings unwise and unjust. Whether many who were convicted of offending in this manner were so guilty as to deserve the whole of the punishment inflicted on them, must be regarded by all dispassionate men as very doubtful. But on the other hand, such men will at once admit that there is no comparison to be made in this respect between the conduct of the triers under the Parliament and Commonwealth, and of the bishops at the Restoration.

At the Restoration, the state of parties was widely

of their boldest adversaries. The truth is, though their authority was null, and though some over rigid and over busy Independents among them were too severe against all that were Arminians, and too particular in inquiring after evidences of sanctification in those whom they examined, and somewhat too lax in admitting of unlearned and erroneous men that favoured Antinomianism, or Anabaptism, yet, to give them their due, they did abundance of good to the church. They saved many a congregation from ignorant, ungodly, drunken teachers,—that sort of men who intend no more in the ministry than to say a sermon, as readers say their common prayers on Sunday, and all the rest of the week go with the people to the ale-house, and harden them in sin; and that sort of preachers, who either preached against a holy life, or preached as men who were never acquainted with it: these they usually rejected, and in their stead admitted of any that were serious preachers, and lived a godly life, of what tolerable opinion soever they were. So that, though many of them were a little partial for the Independents, Separatists, Fifth-monarchy men, and Anabaptists, and against the Prelatists and Arminians; yet so great was the benefit above the hurt which they brought to the church, that many thousands of souls blessed God for the faithful ministers whom they let in, and grieved when the Prelatists afterwards cast them out again.”—*Life and Times*, 72.

different. No hazard could have resulted to the church or the state by the adoption of lenient measures, inasmuch as the Presbyterians and the old Royalists combined, embraced an overwhelming majority of the nation. Nevertheless, the treatment of the Presbyterians, and of all classes of nonconformists, was such as we have related. And as little is there to be said in favour of the proceedings of the same party, during the reign of William III. and Queen Anne. It is my sincere wish to make all fair allowance, even for persecutors; conceding all that may be justly urged in their favour, on account of the tastes, excitements, or prejudices of their times. But when this is done, I am at no loss to perceive on which side the balance of wisdom, justice, and humanity, has nearly always turned in the history of this protracted controversy. It is one thing to exercise charity in judging the conduct even of such churchmen as Laud and Sheldon, and of such Presbyterians as ruled almost to the last in the Long Parliament; and another to speak of those times in the tone of a man insensible to the evils of persecution, and strange to the gratitude and reverence due to the memory of those confessors in the cause of christian and general liberty, whose labours and sufferings have done so much to place us among the most free-born and happy of mankind.

SECTION III.

The Nonconformist controversy confined to matters of Worship and Polity.—Unchristian spirit connected with it still prevalent.—Causes of asperity on this subject.—Tendency of extremes to produce extremes, illustrated.—Subordinate place assigned to Modes of Worship under every dispensation of religion—indicated by the changes they have undergone.—Designed as helps to the weak.—Proneness to fall from the Spirit to the Letter.—Doctrine and Practice of the Apostles in regard to such things.—Principles of ecclesiastical polity,—their subordinate value shown in the manner in which they are taught in the New Testament.—No perfect system to be found there.—Convertible use of terms of office.—This course of proceeding not to have been expected from the Apostles.—Difference between opposing *them*, and rejecting modern interpretations of their language or conduct.—Want of Apostolic Charity on these subjects in all parties.

MANY of the controversies by which the church has been agitated, have had respect to the great truths of our holy religion; but the matters in dispute between the conformists and nonconformists in English history, have been confined, almost entirely, to points of worship and discipline—things which should never have been allowed to place good men at such issue with each other. Happy should we be if we could speak of the infirmities connected with such disputes as belonging to the past only. But if the discussion be less allied than formerly with the ascendancy of one party and the prostration of others, it still leads to an uncharitableness of temper and proceeding which no sober-minded Christian will look upon without grief. It would not, therefore, we think, be well to leave this part of our subject without endeavouring to exhibit

still more strongly, the inconsistency, and the positive irreligion of all such contention on subjects of this nature as is found to be incompatible with the cordial intercourse and real communion of truly devout minds. It is in charity, and not in uniformity, nor in a strict sameness of judgment even on other points, that we must find "the bond of perfectness."

When men begin to make religion an object of serious attention, causes the most various generally combine to produce their ultimate preferences in relation to it. The opinions, sentiments, or usages, thus preferred, may vary considerably, or only very little, from the more generally received standard : but in either case, the mind even of the dullest will commonly be sharpened to the utmost in the defence of points, which are at once, in some sort, the objects of favouritism, and the matters which constitute the line distinguishing the persons who embrace them from Christians of other communions. These things belong to the outposts of our various encampments—the ground where collision begins, and is most frequent ; and where, in consequence, a hostile feeling is likely to become habitual and intense. In the hope of protecting these obnoxious peculiarities against this frequency and rudeness of assault, men will be tempted to magnify their importance, to vest them with a high measure of sanctity, and will often learn by degrees to account themselves religious in proportion to their zeal in support of them, and to deem other men irreligious in proportion to their opposition to them.

Our Divine Lord charged the Pharisees with having made void the law through their traditions, and with having added many superstitious usages to the ritual which Moses had delivered to them ; and nothing can be

more plain than that in the judgment of that sect, the adoption or rejection of their own inventions was the most certain evidence that any man could afford as to his religion or impiety. Human nature in this respect is still the same, and, placed in similar circumstances, is too often found betraying the same weakness. Extremes are ever producing extremes, and like producing like. The Sadducees who believed too little, were the natural offspring of the Pharisees who believed too much: and the sect in modern times which shall raise what is peculiar to it as a sect, to the place of what is common to it as a part of the great christian community, may soon find that its nearest and most formidable opponent will not be indisposed to cope with it in this new movement by taking a similar position. In the days of Lord Bacon, churchmen in this country began to assert, not only that Episcopacy was the primitive ecclesiastical government, but that without it there could be no christian church or religion.* But this was no sooner done than the Presbyterians, both in England and Scotland, began to discover that *their* polity was based on this divine and exclusive right; and the result was, that all thought of settlement, by any thing like mutual concession, was abandoned, and the war between those parties became one in which each aimed at nothing less than victory and the extinction of the vanquished. In one or the other of these foolish extremes, nearly the whole nation was soon afterwards included. We speak of them as foolish, because so they must appear if dispassionately viewed in the light of Holy Scripture; and the same spirit in our own time is entitled

* Advertisement touching the Controversies of the Church of England.—Works, vii. 28—60.

to no better description. Weakness, indeed, is not the element in it most to be deplored.

That considerable difference in *modes of worship* should not be allowed to separate the hearts of Christians from each other, may be inferred from the relation which every thing ritual in religion bears to religion itself. It has its existence solely as means to an end. It is intended to embody the truths and lessons of piety, so that the reason and the heart may be attracted toward them through the medium of the senses and the imagination. This is the end proposed by them; and the great point, accordingly, would seem to be, not so much to know whether a man has been very careful in the observance of what we may deem the most scriptural and devout form of worship, as whether he is found to possess that spiritual intelligence and feeling, for the sake of which, and for the sake of which alone, all such external forms have existence. If the end be obtained, it must have been by the use of means, and of means to which God, in every such case, has put his seal of approbation. Men may be taught to observe the forms of godliness without knowing the power of it, but the converse is impossible. The sameness of christian character among persons adopting different modes of worship, is not only a proof of the subordination of forms, as means to an end, but of the condescension of God in operating upon the soul through means so various and contradictory, and, of necessity, so imperfect and erroneous. It is a bad sign when we seem more concerned to make formalists than to make Christians.

This subordinate character of every thing pertaining to modes of worship, is further intimated in the change which they have undergone in different ages of the Church.

The principles of religion, and the great rules of duty, have been the same from the beginning ; but not so the manner in which men have been required or permitted to approach their Maker in the formal acts of worship. This has varied with all the freedom of a positive institution, which is either good or evil, simply as it may happen to have been enjoined or prohibited by the Almighty. In the patriarchal age, the worship of God was conducted in the manner which it is natural to expect in a comparatively rude state of society ; and subsequent to the age of Moses it was carried on by means of a complex and splendid ritual, which accorded, on the same principle, with the more advanced civilization of the people who were then called to engage in it. On the introduction of the present economy, the whole of that elaborate ceremonial which stood in connexion with the preceding dispensation was abolished. Thus the scaffolding has been changed, as the edifice has proceeded. The present dispensation will conclude with the raising of the last stone to its place amid "shoutings of grace, grace, unto it;" and our instructions concerning the external machinery by which this last portion of the structure is to be raised, are few, simple, and often indirect, presenting a marked contrast to those contained in the Book of Leviticus. So possible is it that religion should be perpetuated, and continue the same, while the outward forms connected with it present not a little variety and change. Abraham looked forward to the Great Sacrifice from the wood-pile on Mount Moriah ; and Isaiah, from the splendid ceremonial of the temple ; and with Paul it was an object of retrospect, as he dispensed to the church the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

It should tend also to moderate our estimate of all that

is visible in our modes of worship, when we call to mind that so far as they are designed to convey instruction, they are at best only so many proofs of our weakness, existing in consequence of our inaptitude to learn except as taught, in the manner of children, by the assistance of pictures. It may be well that the installations of knighthood, the inauguration of magistrates, and the coronation of monarchs, should be attended with the ceremony and pomp which usually accompany them. In such pageantries we see the effort of the human spirit to give visibility to the high abstractions of thought and sentiment involved in the relations sustained by such personages. But in all such performances the philosophic statesman has an eye to the impression usually made by them on the many, and not to any fitness in them to convey information, or to present any really imposing spectacle to minds like his own. Religion, in every age and country, has had its ceremonial, in common with the state, and for the same ends. We except the ritual of the Church from this observation only in part, though of divine appointment, and chosen by Infinite Wisdom to become the vehicle of revealed truth. So far as it has been emblematic, it may be regarded as the language of condescension addressed to imbecility; and whether simple or complex in its texture, men have too often shown a much stronger disposition to sink down to the letter of such observances, than to rise to the spirit of them. Accordingly, under the present dispensation,—the last and the perfect economy of the divine goodness to men,—the human mind is treated as though less needing assistance of this sort than in ancient times, and is left with a slight outline, or passing hints for its guidance. The great object now placed

before men is the worship of the Father in spirit and in truth ; and where there is most of that kind of worship, there will be least inclination to attach great importance to mere ecclesiastical prescription on such matters. The men who made broad their phylacteries, and who, in many other respects, were not content with the ritual which God had enjoined upon them, are described by the Searcher of hearts, as persons who had lost the spirit of devotion, and who would fain have substituted their zeal about such things in its place.

This view of the relative value of modes of worship, as indicated in their general character, and in some things pertaining to their history as connected with the ancient church, must dispose the thoughtful and unprejudiced to anticipate that spirit of moderation in which all such matters were regarded by the Apostles, and by the primitive Christians. Nothing is more certain from the apostolic records than that differences in this respect obtained in the primitive Church, and that such differences were not deemed incompatible with a cordial union among Christians. St. Paul urges upon believers, often and earnestly, the importance of cultivating the utmost possible agreement, both in opinion and ecclesiastical usage. But at the same time, being well aware that diversity on such matters would continue to arise, he laid it down as a general rule, that Christians should think charitably concerning the motives of each other in regard to such things, so long as they were not of a description to entrench upon the truths necessary to the existence of true religion.

Thus the customs of the Jews in relation to the sanctity of certain meats and days, were adhered to by some who became converts to Christianity, and were

abandoned by others. This difference of judgment and conduct, among men who had been alike Jews, and who were now alike professors of Christianity, was viewed by the Apostle as tending to produce disputes and schisms. To prevent such a result he enjoins that the man whose greater light enabled him to avail himself of his full liberty as a Christian, so as to cease from all such usages, should not despise his brother, whose more limited views left him still in subjection to them ; and that the latter, instead of looking on the greater freedom assumed by the former as proceeding from a want of regard to divine authority, should see in it nothing more than a difference of judgment consistent with a sincerity of intention not inferior to his own. Thus the primitive Christian was to be prepared to say on this question, “ He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord : and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord ; for he giveth God thanks : and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not ; and giveth God thanks.” The object of both, the one in doing, and the other in not doing, is traced to the same source—a solicitude to fulfil the will of God ; the different conduct pursued, being the natural result of the different judgments formed concerning that will. In this manner, diversity was to be softened and blended, under the presiding influence of charity. Every man would of necessity have his own views concerning such things ; but instead of making the precise accuracy of such views his great object, he was called upon to judge rather, that no man through want of candour and consideration in respect to questions of that nature, should put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother’s way. The great objects of the

christian fellowship were not to be hazarded, on account of customs having no essential relation to them. Men were not thus to destroy the work of God for the sake of meat.

Hence, to the same body of Christians, the Apostle addressed himself after this wise:—"The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."* Here our being acceptable to God, is made to rest on *moral* grounds, apart from every thing *ceremonial*—"righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost:"—and we are exhorted to the special study of such things as tend most to edify or build up this spiritual structure in the soul.

On the controversy relating to circumcision the Apostle also expressed himself in the same tone of holy expostulation, vindicating the moderation of his views on that subject by a similar appeal to the ascendancy of the moral over every thing merely ritual, which is so characteristic of the present dispensation, as the "dispensation of the Spirit." While men were wasting their strength, and sacrificing their christian temper, if not their Christianity, in disputes about a Jewish rite, the Apostle, in the true feeling of his vocation, exclaimed, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but keeping of the commandments of God." Again also he says, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them and mercy!"

* Rom. xiv.

“ Let them retain circumcision, or let them set it at nought, the great point with me is to know that they are believing, regenerated men, and as such it shall ever be mine to rejoice in them as parts of the Israel of God. Partaking of this character, they are now in reality, and will ere long be openly, the accepted of the Most High, and have an abundant entrance administered unto them into the kingdom of his dear Son, when many a zealot who denounced them as mere pretenders, because they were or were not circumcised, shall be excluded.” His calling, the devout Apostle assures us, was not that he should be absorbed in the discussion of such questions, but that he should be set for the defence of the Gospel, considered in its great doctrines and purpose. It was for this cause, and not as finding pleasure in debates concerning meats and drinks, or circumcision, or strivings about the law, that he was “ in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons frequent, in deaths oft.” Henceforth, he exclaims, let no man trouble me with such questions, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus—proofs that I seek not my own things, and that the things of others which I do seek, are not those which influence the zeal of the formalist.

Thus the course which the Apostle commended to others, was constantly exemplified in his own conduct. We find him conforming with what he must have regarded as a worthless, but inoffensive ceremony, by purifying himself in company with four men who had a vow. This he did in compliance with the advice of certain brethren at Jerusalem, and in hope of abating the force of the prejudice raised against him in consequence of his being every where charged with aiming at nothing less than an immediate abolition of the Mosaic customs. It

was no doubt true that he wished to see those customs utterly abolished ; but it was not true, as insinuated and affirmed, that he made an absolute renunciation of them a necessary preliminary to the profession of the Gospel. On the contrary, Jewish converts were always borne with in the indulgence of their fond attachments on that point, so long as they were not ensnared by them, after the manner of the Galatians, into a dependence on such observances inconsistent with a saving reliance upon the cross of Christ. In this better sense, our Apostle consented to the circumcision of Timothy, looking at the very time upon the prejudice to which he thus bowed as a lamentable weakness.

And this was the course which he always pursued, opposing himself, with a firmness which nothing could move, to every such use or view of existing customs as comported not with a due recognition of the essential truths of the Gospel : but always tolerant in respect of them so long as they were kept in subordination to the spirit of evangelical religion. He would not conform to any thing which his own conscience regarded as positively evil ; nor did he require such conformity from others ; but harmless usages, and even such as were, in some respects, from the weakness of human nature, of doubtful tendency, if the good likely to result from the use of them, promised, in the peculiar circumstances and spirit of the times, to be much greater than the evil to which they might be perverted, he did not scruple to comply with them himself, and failed not to bear with them in others.

Now from these facts it would seem to follow, and with a clearness not to be innocently misapprehended, that every professing Christian who suffers his mind to become alienated from his brother Christian on account of his

particular preferences in regard to modes of worship, is, to the extent of such alienation, placing himself at issue with Apostolic precept and example ; and that all systems which make such things essentials of communion, are necessarily so far antichristian. Men who act in the spirit of such systems, withhold the due exercise of brotherly affection, upon grounds on which an Apostle, though possessing all the authority of inspiration, would not have withheld it. Those extraordinary persons, whose miracles sometimes taught the multitude to regard them as gods in the likeness of men, and who spoke with the tongue of angels more than of humanity, were accustomed to respect even the weakest selections of a misguided conscience in such matters. Not that they were without authority to have put an end at once to all such differences, and to have established a perfect uniformity of worship, both among Jews and Gentiles ; but they saw in the application of the Gospel to the fallen spirits of men, the beginnings only, of a slow, though certain recovery, and they no more insisted on an immediate perfection in respect to the outward forms of worship, than in regard to the weightier matters of spiritual attainment. Had it been the design of the Gospel to give completeness at once to the power of godliness, it would have been only consistent to have required the same in its form. But so long as it was found to be expedient, and even necessary, to bear with deficiencies in the greater things of the spiritual life, it would have been to fall into the capital error of the formalist in every age, to have manifested a less tolerant spirit concerning religious ceremonies—particularly, as even the dispensations of Heaven had proclaimed all such things to be mere adjuncts, always liable to change or abolition, and

connected with religion more as matters of expediency than necessity.

Beside which, the Apostles could not but foresee that questions of this nature would vary in their complexion in every age and country, in consequence of the differences of national character and customs. Hence, though they might have settled all points of this description which arose in their own age, as their inspired authority terminated with themselves, no provision existed for the infallible settlement of such questions in future. The example, accordingly, which the apostles have left, is not that of the zealous ritualist, insisting on a rigid uniformity, but that of men who were careful to inculcate a d exemplify forbearance in such things, to the utmost extent consistent with preserving the great elements of a devout Christianity. Happy and honoured spirits ! would that all who have professed to follow in your path had been ennobled by the same large views of the religion of the cross, and constrained to look with the same humanized sympathy on the infirmities of their common nature ! Fearful will be your rising in the judgment against the men who have boasted much of treading in your steps, or of being inheritors of your functions, while lost to your conceptions of the religion they have professed, and aliens from the spirit by which in your history it was so richly adorned ! What a scene would the past have presented to the eye of the ecclesiastical historian, if the mantle of apostolic charity had indeed fallen on all who in after times professed and called themselves Christians ! What is now as the arid desert, had then been as the garden of the Lord ; and regions awfully desolate, as by the outbreaks of a volcano, had been clothed with verdure and fertility, and the place of joy

and melody! We might then have possessed a truly national church, or have had sects without sectarianism, and the enemy would have lacked his abundant occasion to blaspheme.

The reasoning advanced, for the purpose of showing the subordinate place assigned in the christian system to every thing merely ritual, applies generally to its method of presenting all questions relating to *ecclesiastical government*. Its worship and its polity are alike means to an end, and derive the whole of their worth from adaptation to their object. But as church polity embraces rules affecting the system of instruction, as well as matters of government, and is designed to preserve the substance, of which every thing ceremonial is merely the shadow, it was of importance that its great principles at least should be distinctly indicated. How far we consider this to have been done, will appear from what has been said elsewhere.

It is deserving of notice in relation to our object, that the ecclesiastical polity of the New Testament assumed the shape in which it is known to us by slow degrees, and under the influence of circumstances; and not, it would seem, as the effect of any abstract theory previously existing in the mind of the inspired writers. Our blessed Lord, in calling to himself his twelve Apostles, in giving his commission to the seventy, and in imparting to the economy of his church the social complexion set forth in the seventeenth of Matthew, had respect to usages which had become sacred among the people to whom he ministered. There was a sanctity attached, in the popular imagination, to those numbers; and the outline of ecclesiastical relations and government delivered to his church in the chapter adverted to, was

taken, as all learned men agree, from the long established polity of the Jewish synagogues. He well knew that the effect of custom on the mind of the Jewish people would be to dispose them strongly toward such a form of government; while its simplicity, its independence of the civil power, and the ease with which it might be made to adapt itself to circumstances in other countries, and in distant times, were also considerations much in its favour. In the institution of the Deacon's office, after our Lord's decease, we witness, still more strikingly, the operation of circumstances, and of the plea of immediate utility, as distinct from all fixed and preconceived theory, in giving existence to ecclesiastical functionaries, in determining the sphere of their duty, and in moulding the general polity of the church. In the same manner miraculous powers, and particular offices connected with them,—as the interpreters of tongues, and the discerners of spirits,—were evidently bestowed to meet the exigencies of the times; the Gospel being then exposed to the perils of its first onset against the prejudices and depravity of a fallen world. Nor were those offices, or some others which have equally ceased to be known among us, designed to be common to all the churches of that period, any more than to all time. Now, the conclusion suggested by a fair attention to such facts would seem to be, not that the polity discoverable in the New Testament was destitute of any thing intended to be permanent, but simply, that whatever was designed to be continued in all countries, and through all time, will be found to be of a very general nature, tending to confirm our impression with regard to the high spiritual tendencies of the Gospel, and the complete subordination of every thing exterior to its inward work upon the soul.

Nor is it possible to resist a still stronger impression of this nature, when we call to mind the fact of our being left to form opinions on all topics of this description in so great a degree from obscure intimations, from passing notices, or as matters of inference. Much is said concerning the spiritual qualifications necessary to christian fellowship, but comparatively little in regard to the precise rules by which that fellowship should be instituted and carried on. Elaborate descriptions are also given with respect to the natural and spiritual requisites necessary to the efficient discharge of certain offices; but so little as to the manner in which such persons should be called to those trusts, that on this point the most learned, judicious, and holy of mankind, are found to be of very opposite judgments. All religious parties, in consequence, are obliged to admit, that the *details* of their systems are not to be found in the sacred Scriptures. Their appeal to that authority is uniformly as containing the outline, or certain great principles of their polity, the filling-up being their own. All take this ground with some reluctance; and they no sooner meet even here, than warm debates ensue between them, in regard even to those general principles which are the only things they can hope to ascertain. Now this manner of proceeding on the part of the inspired writers, was not to have been expected, if any thing approaching to a strict agreement on points of this description had been deemed necessary to fraternal feeling and communion among Christians. Had differences upon such grounds been contemplated as a sufficient cause for disaffection and exclusion, care would surely have been taken to have given us "line upon line," on subjects of that nature, no less than in relation to the great truths of the Gospel,

and the essential duties of the christian life. Nor is it of any avail to say, that differences on these great matters are also abundant among professing Christians. Our differences of opinion in regard to the great doctrines of revelation, are not at all parallel with those which occur on the topics adverted to; and can no more be admitted as valid argument in this case, than the assumption that the evidences of Christianity must be insufficient, since there are men who have access to it, and still avow themselves infidels.

The manner, moreover, in which the terms used to designate the most familiar ecclesiastical offices are employed in the New Testament, is so unsettled, as to indicate very clearly that no such importance had then been attached to certain alleged distinctions between them as we find common in later times. We may affirm the intention of the inspired writers to have been to fix three permanent offices in the church—those of bishop, presbyter, and deacon; or we may contend that the distinction between the two former is imaginary, the two designations being only different terms for the same office. But to both these parties it should be evident, that there is at least so little of fixed appropriation in the use of those titles in the New Testament; as strongly to suggest that a precise agreement in regard to the shades of difference supposed to separate them from each other, could never have been designed to form an essential article of union among Christians. It is undeniable, that there are instances in which the same persons are called, and at the same time, both bishops and presbyters, the two names being used apparently as denoting one office: that these words which are used thus indiscriminately and interchangeably, in the manner

of words having the same meaning, are never used together, in the manner of words having a different signification; and that the duties said to devolve on the persons called by both, or by either of these names, are in substance the same.

Whether we conclude from these facts against the distinction between the two orders, or remain persuaded that there are traces of such a distinction observable, it should at least be clear that the phraseology of Holy Scripture would never have been left thus loose and convertible, had the points of difference supposed to mark the two offices, been intended to constitute a matter of acknowledgment essential to the unity of christian affection. No one dreams of such a promiscuous application of official names in any other connexion. On few points, in fact, are men so tenacious as on that of being called by their proper title, especially when it designates a sphere of power or duty, upon which, if not accurately defined, kindred functionaries may be tempted to encroach. Of this we have a striking illustration in the many and long disputes which have been maintained concerning the respective limits of the civil and ecclesiastical powers in modern Europe: as well as in the elaborate care that has everywhere been exercised, to adjust the gradations of authority included in each of those divisions, and the terms by which they are designated. We need not come lower down than the age of Cyprian, to find the distinction between the two offices mentioned above sufficiently distinct; and from that time it is never allowed to be out of our sight. We say not now that the distinction did not exist in the apostolic age: all we mean to say is, that had it been as marked then as it was soon afterwards, there could not have been any contro-

versy about it. The just inference on this point would therefore seem to be, that to the end of the apostolic age, the polity of the church was in process of formation; and that it was left at last by the inspired guides of the church, in a state partaking so little of strict uniformity or complete detail, as to teach us plainly that Christians should guard, with the greatest solicitude, against suffering themselves to be alienated from each other on account of their differences of judgment in relation to points of that nature.

Nothing, indeed, could well have imparted more unseemliness to the pretension, which would restrict religion to one exclusive form of church polity, than the manner in which the Apostles were content to treat that subject altogether. It is important also to observe, that this course of proceeding on that topic, was so different from what it would have been reasonable to expect from such persons, as to force upon us the conviction that it was the work of design. The Apostles were Jews; whose former religion, after the oriental manner, had embraced a most complex ritual and ecclesiastical polity; intermixing observances of a religious nature, from season to season, and from day to day, with all the affairs of social life, and in a form so definite as to leave no jot or tittle to the discretion of the worshipper. It was thus that the priesthood of Egypt had moulded their religious system from a very early age; and the theocratic worship of the great Asiatic empires had ever been of the same character,—their priests being as much a secular as a spiritual aristocracy, and their religious polity blended everywhere with their social state, as in the case of the modern Hindoos.

Hence it is not without some effort of imagination and reflection that we can apprehend the force of the

restraint which must have been laid upon natural and conventional inclination, before the Apostles, as the founders of a new religion, were brought to pursue a course in this respect so much at variance with the customs which had prevailed from immemorial time over the extended region of the earth most familiar to them. Questions of polity and worship could not have been treated in a manner less Asiatic than by these men, born and bred in the midst of orientalism. Admitting that the Apostles, disowned everywhere by the civil power, could not, in this respect, have copied the example of the Aaronic priesthood, or that of the great priest *castes* of Egypt and ancient Persia; still it is obvious that there was ample space left to them for indulging in this kind of legislation over the independent masses who owned their authority, had they been so disposed. But in fact they looked not merely to the East. Their views were directed to the wide earth, as the scene in which Christianity was to give proof of its power; and, in consequence, they left every thing external connected with it, so much a matter of broad general principles, as to favour its admission into any land, without interfering with the current of its secular manners and institutions. Thus, wherever they came, they proclaimed a religion—new, not only in its name and exclusive pretensions, but in its whole complexion;—a religion consisting, not in a laboured code, or a ritual of minutiae, framed to subserve the schemes of worldly ambition, but one connected with few and simple institutions, and having for its object, “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

Nor must we forget to observe here, that, supposing a uniform judgment concerning modes of worship and forms of government to have been necessary to our being

recognised as members of the christian church in the apostolic age, it by no means follows that the want of such agreement in the present day must imply, in the same manner, the want of Christianity. In the first age of the church, the Apostles were present to explain at once, and completely, all points about which there might be any difference of apprehension, so that any instance of opposition to their will was, in fact, the same thing with a revolt from the authority of Christ himself. But in our case, there is no question in regard to the duty of bowing to the judgment of the Apostles. This we all profess ourselves anxious to do. Our perplexity is in reference to what the Apostles have, or have not, set forth for our guidance. We all of us conceive that it is not the will of Christ that we are questioning, but our neighbour's interpretation of that will. We are, therefore, in a position, with regard to such things, much to the effect of the case described by the Apostle in the fourteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans:—if we conform to certain usages, or if we refuse to do so, our conduct in either case may be the result of the same principle, namely, a solemn deference to the supposed will of Christ; so that in the language of the Apostle we may say,—To the Lord we do it, or to the Lord we do it not.

We speak of these cases as similar; but there is one point of marked difference between them, and one which shows, that if the controversy having respect to meats and days was not to become the occasion of uncharitableness among the Christians at Rome, much less should such an effect be allowed to follow on account of similar or much greater differences as subsisting among us. St. Paul might at once have delivered the will of the Lord on the points then in dispute, and might thus have

precluded all occasion for the exercise of that mutual forbearance and charity which he so earnestly enjoined concerning them. But when we find him abstaining from such an exercise of his functions, we are justified in believing that considerable latitude was intended to be left in such things ; and that, in the sight of God, the spirit of kindly forbearance that might be called forth by them, was of much greater price than any conformity of usage in relation to them that might have been produced by any such act of mere authority. And the question here naturally recurs—If Apostles, men gifted with the spirit of inspiration, and clothed with the power of working miracles, were wont to be thus tolerant, where are the persons, or where is the system, that would really suffer loss by conforming to this example ?

But in the place of this, we too often see the Congregationalist mar the simplicity of the bold and beautiful outline of ecclesiastical order which his system presents ; sometimes destroying the harmony of an otherwise happy and prosperous church, by attaching an undue importance to little details—details as certainly and as much the work of man's devising as any to be found in the history of ecclesiastical usage ; while the Presbyterian pledges himself to his league and covenant, as the only proper medium through which to seek the preservation or propagation of the truth, and is long in learning to do altogether without its aid ;—and high above these stands the Church of England with her "book" open before her, exhibiting to the eye of spectators an almost endless gradation of ecclesiastical offices, and multitude of minute ecclesiastical observances ; and though conscious that these are nearly all the inventions of man, she demands from every one who would minister at her

altars, an “unfeigned assent and consent to all and every thing” so presented; this she does long, denying to all dissentients the right of engaging at all in the public worship of the Deity; and this she does still, on pain of exclusion from her fellowship. Oh! Spirit of apostolic charity, when—when wilt thou return, and the long-lost concord, power, and blessedness of the church of God be restored?

SECTION IV.

Present Position of Congregational Dissenters—Greater Numbers—Still found principally in the Middle Class—Increased Public Spirit—Less subject to Civil Grievance.—Peculiar Complexion and Spirit of Society.—Improvement in the general character of the Established Church—Present State of Parties included in it.—Methodism.—Duties of Congregationalists in these circumstances.—Supreme Importance of a Devout Spirit.—Necessity of great Public Exertion,—of keeping pace with the more Educated Character of Society,—of Raising the Standard of Ministerial Qualification,—and the Special Duty of All Parties to cultivate a spirit of Consideration, Forbearance, and Charity.

IN passing from this rapid view of the history of English Congregationalism, to the consideration of its present position, our attention is first arrested by a *difference of numbers*.

For example—in the southern, or Surrey suburb of London, where, two centuries ago, the only persons meeting for the worship of God except in the manner enjoined by the state, were those included in the small brotherhood which is still represented by the church assembly in Union-street, there are now about fifty Congregational churches, including Independents and Baptists; and the largest portion of accommodation for persons disposed to meet for the worship of God in that extensive district, if we take in all denominations, has

been provided, not by the state, but by the voluntary efforts of the population. Thus, in a locality where, two hundred years since, the state did little for religion, and the people nothing, and where almost every man seemed to receive his faith in the shape expounded to him by the two Houses of Convocation, and by the two Houses of Parliament, there has been such a working of the small germ of Independency, that all the provision which the state has made for the advantage of its favoured denomination, is equalled, and even surpassed, by that which has sprung from the free and spontaneous zeal of the people themselves. By the side of the principle which is supposed to be so necessary to the existence of religion, but which refuses to do it service except through the machinery of state enactments, we see another make its appearance, having its origin and guidance from the intelligence and feeling which disposes men to consider religion as a matter of individual responsibility, and as of high concernment in their relation to God, rather than to Cæsar; and this last principle, though so recently called into exercise, and acted upon in the midst of artificial circumstances tending to place the selfishness and prejudice of multitudes in the most determined array against it, is seen taking precedence of the former one as a source of provision for the religious wants of the surrounding community. Nor is this peculiar to the Surrey suburb of the metropolis; it is rather a sample of what has taken place, with slight variation, in every populous department of the country. It is admitted, they are not all Congregationalists who are now acting, more or less, and with so much general effect, on this principle; but it was reserved to the body so designated to bring out this principle, and to procure for it the

various amount of practical homage which is now rendered to it.

Congregationalism is not like Methodism, a system of compromise and adjustment, formed in deference to the prejudice and feeling of the hour. It is the effect of a devout and firm-hearted appeal to the exact nature and design of Christianity; and the result to be expected from principles so adopted has been realized. Derived from what is unalterable in the injunctions and spirit of our benign and holy religion, it has itself been permanent. It has grown with our population, our wealth, and our intelligence, and especially with our attachment to even-handed justice, and equal liberty; and whatever its enemies may fondly promise themselves, *we* are satisfied that its course in the future will be as in the past. If, in addition to the increase of their numbers, Congregationalists are justified in looking on every thing free in the temper and proceedings of the religious bodies around us, as the effect of their early avowed principles, then have they much reason to thank God and take courage. In fact, when searching for encouragement in any effort to do good, our inquiries should never be confined to the positive and unmixed benefit we may have been able to confer. This may be very small, while the evil prevented, and the indirect or partial good bestowed, may be of vast amount.

The second point observable in the present position of English Congregationalists, as compared with the past, is their *greater freedom from civil grievance* on account of their religious profession. The Test Act, designed to exclude the Catholic from places of civil trust, which it was feared he would employ, and not without effect, against the liberties of the country, was

supported by the Protestant nonconformist on the principle of a self-denying patriotism. His Protestant brethren of the Church of England spoke much in praise of his magnanimity on that occasion, and promised a relief bill in his favour ; but no relief bill made its appearance ; and more than a century and a half was to intervene before it became possible to extort a removal of the badge of inferiority and distrust to which the whole body of the nonconformists were in this manner made subject. With the removal of the Test Act, we now have to connect the benefits conferred by the Acts relating to Marriage and Registration. Every friend of order and peace will well regret that a recent measure, intended to relieve the Dissenter from a constantly returning impost, which he regards as unjust, and must ever feel as a grievance, and the removal of which might be accomplished without the slightest danger to any public interest, has been for a time frustrated. This question remains, together with that concerning admission to the old Universities, as fuel ready to be kindled into a flame on some future occasion, when, in all probability, the dangerous element will defy control, much more successfully than would be possible in the present state of parties among us. The concessions of the weak avail them little ; it is when made by the strong that they are felt as a boon. But to expect classes or parties of men willingly to forego monopoly of any kind, so as to admit excluded portions of the community to a participation in their privileges, is to look for something of more rare occurrence in human affairs, than that the churl should become liberal, or the proud man condescending and humane. The sort of conscience which belongs to bodies of men is little trustworthy. An

individual will do as one of a party, as he would never think of doing on his own responsibility, or in his own affairs.

But if Dissenters have not access to the old Universities—which, after all, is perhaps no *real* loss to them—they may now obtain the distinctions which indicate proficiency in literature and science, without passing the limits of their country, and without any conformity to religious tests; and these distinctions may be made as available for all secular purposes, as those of the ancient seats of learning. On the whole, therefore, if we except the few years of the Protectorate, the condition of the portion of the community dissenting from the Established Church, is one of unprecedented freedom and happiness. Added to which, it has been our lot to see a greater advance made, within the last seven years, toward placing the general institutions of the country on a basis of equity, than had been made during the hundred years preceding. With this felicitous state of things, we have to contrast the condition of all conscientious religionists under the iron rule of the last of the Tudors, and under the less vigorous, but hardly less oppressive policy, of the four princes of the house of Stuart. While we cherish gratitude to the Author of all good on this account, and would learn to cultivate a deeper interest than ever in the honour and welfare of our country, it is proper to mark on these points, as on some preceding, the source in which this change has originated, and from which affairs have received the often-repeated impetus necessary to its accomplishment. That the large and generous theory of religious liberty, now so far realized in the actual condition of this country, was first struck out, and avowed as just and practicable, by religious men, and that those men were the fathers of Congregationalism,—is unques-

tionable. From the obscure retreats, where the small bands of confessors of that order were accustomed to debate and discourse on these high themes—holding the scorn of a nation and of a world as a thing of nought—their bold thoughts were slowly but steadily diffused, until they found advocates in councils, and senates, and cabinets; and as the effect of a long war of opinion, in which the issues were too often doubtful, those larger habits of thought have now given their free and fearless impression to our statutes, and usages, and household feelings as a people. Thus did Christianity itself ascend from such little circles as the family at Bethany, until it gained admission into “kings’ houses,” and is found on the throne of the Cæsars, sending forth its exhaustless charities from the lowest to the highest of mankind. The Puritans acquitted themselves well on questions of civil liberty, but on the more difficult question of liberty of conscience their views were always defective and inconsistent. It was left to a sect which grew up at their side, their own offspring, but toward whom they never discovered the kindness of a parent, to separate between the kingdoms of the earth, and the kingdom which is not of this world, so as to be capable of laying down those broad maxims of social right and religious equality, which gave its members a place apart from all who had gone before them. When it is stated, therefore, by an enemy of the Puritans, that to them we are indebted for the preservation of the spark of English liberty, this must be understood, in strictness, of civil liberty only, the rights of conscience being imperfectly apprehended by that party at any time. If the reader doubts this, let him look to the law against blasphemy, passed by the Puritan majority of the Long Parliament not long before the death of the king.

Another point observable, but observable as one of perpetuity, and not of contrast—is the fact, that Congregationalism still finds *the body of its adherents among the middle class*. We do not scruple to say, that we look with some pleasure on this manifest aptitude of our system to commend itself to that part of the community which all wise men regard as the most sound—as having in it much the larger portion of real social health. Its founder—or, more correctly, its restorer—was a man of humane feeling, of eminent piety, and of high mental culture; and a considerable admixture of these qualities, so conspicuous in Robinson of Leyden, seems to be necessary to a full understanding, and a strictly wise use, of the system which obtained his affectionate approval. But it would be well, perhaps, for Congregational Churches seriously to inquire, whether their system has been worked in later time so wisely as it might have been. We speak of the great principles of this system as unalterable; but in the *application* of them, there is, perhaps, much more flexibility admissible, than the most intelligent of our churches at present apprehend. The religious system which fails to bring the rich and the poor together, may be thus at fault, mainly in consequence of adventitious and artificial circumstances. This is no doubt the case with ourselves; but the failure of the Congregational polity in the respect adverted to, may also have been the result, in part, of its not being employed with sufficient care, as the means of regulating and improving the intercourse between the man of low degree and of high degree, so as to prevent its being used in a manner to break down the proper lines of demarcation between them. Churches which can allow a coarse, fierce spirit of democracy to pass current, as

little or nothing more than a due exercise of christian liberty, must not expect to make any considerable impression on men whose opulence, station, or mental power, has raised them above a very moderate level in general society.

But if in this respect our position has been stationary, it has been materially improved within the last half century by our *greater activity*. If our sphere of action be the same, we have learnt to bring more general and steady effort to bear upon it. Religious objects, as connected with our locality, our denomination, or the general interest of Christianity, are ever calling our ministers and our laity from the old routine of chapel worship and church business, to public and catholic efforts; and thus making it necessary that we should fill more space, come more frequently and fully before the eye of the public, than was the case with our forefathers in the last century. These local and general institutions act like the call of a muster-roll, summoning every man to his post and his duty. They improve the capacity for public service, by putting it into constant requisition. They render us more familiar with the varieties of human character, and enable us, in consequence, to act with more unity and effect. Thus our efforts to communicate good, become, in every way, our best means of obtaining it. It is not a small part of the internal harmony and prosperity of the Dissenting churches in England, that has resulted from this greater measure of public spirit, with which the gracious Head of the church has blessed them. The Dissenter is now known in other respects than as the frequenter of a meeting-house in the court or lane of his neighbourhood.

But we must guard against forming a delusive estimate

of our advantage in this respect. It places us on high ground as compared with our predecessors some generations since : but it may be doubted whether it gives us any advantage in comparison with our times, which they did not possess in comparison with the state of society then existing. We may be much in advance of *them*, and not at all more in advance of the general state of things around us than was the fact in their instance ; and it is very important to inquire, whether we are not in danger of attributing our greater degree of public spirit, as compared with the good men who have gone before us, to a greater strength of religious principle, when, in fact, it is little else than the consequence of our yielding to that impulse which has come upon society at large in our time, wonderfully augmenting its rate of activity, in every department of human exertion.

We proceed, therefore, to remark, in the next place, that Congregationalism has to maintain its position now in connexion with a *state of society* differing very much from any thing with which it has previously been brought into contact. I have said that it is a state of society in which the rate of *activity* in every department of human exertion is wonderfully augmented : and how manifest is this ! There have been times when the comparatively idle might be successful ; but no man of discernment can expect such things to happen now. Human life, in all its pursuits, has become an eager race, in which the negligent are sure to be left behind. Whether the object of pursuit be the gains of ordinary traffic, as carried on by the tradesman in his shop, or by the merchant on 'Change ; or that of men engaged in professional life ; or the still higher aim of those who aspire to distinction in literature, in science, or in politi-

cal influence—all are agreed in predicting the failure of the man who is not a man of application. Persons who would acquire wealth, must be inured to labour; and our men of genius, who have attained to permanent eminence, are distinguished by their ceaseless industry, as much as by their natural endowments. As it is with individuals, so is it with bodies of men. If they would make any impression on their times, they must not only be well organized, but watchful, provident, energetic.

With this greater activity, as characterising the present state of society, we may connect the *greater average ability* with which all its offices are filled. Men, who were judged competent to the duties in which they were engaged some fifty years ago, would, in no few cases, be accounted an incumbrance, rather than a help, in the same situations among ourselves. Matters which then passed through many hands, are now assigned to a few; and the result from the labours of the few is, in general, more speedy, and more complete, than once followed from those of the greater number. It is surprising to observe how small a portion of natural or acquired ability often sufficed to realize large fortunes in past times. It was thus in law, in medicine, and in general occupation. But at present, even industry, if not joined with some force of discernment, has little prospect of success. In literature, in science, and in public life, it is another amount, and, I may say, another *kind* of ability, that is necessary to real distinction, than was required formerly. Books are written now, and forgotten almost as soon as published, which, had they appeared in a past age, would have been applauded and preserved as remarkable productions of genius.

But when we speak of the ability of the past as

inferior to that of the present, we must be understood to speak of ability in its average; that is, as existing in society generally, and not as seen in the instance of extraordinary persons. There were minds in those days, of such power as to awe all kindred natures to a distance, and to vest themselves with a kind of sovereignty in their generation. Such were Bacon, Milton, and Newton. We have no men who can be named as the rivals of these persons. But it is a peculiarity of the state of society in our time, that if we have not individuals to place in competition with such men, we have an unprecedented number of powerful and richly cultivated minds, engaged in the pursuits to which the genius of those highly-gifted persons was applied, and which make up, and even more than make up, in the aggregate, what is wanting in the individual. If we have less of the *giant* in us than our forefathers, we have more of the *legion*. The intellectual control of our times is with the informed mass, and not with the solitary personage.

It is, perhaps, to this greater distribution of the elements of power and success, that we are to attribute much of the *restless dissatisfaction with present attainment*, which may be regarded as another remarkable feature of our times. No matter what advance may be made in commerce, in science, in arts, in literature, in economy, in government, there is still an onwardness in the spirit of society which is constantly disposing multitudes to forget what is behind in reaching toward what is before. The numbers engaged in these several pursuits, seem to return to them from day to day as though drawn by all the force of novelty. The main effect of what they do, is to disclose to them how much more

it may be possible to do. The achievement of to-day becomes the starting-point of to-morrow. Each man, as he succeeds, becomes more confident himself, and begets confidence in others. Something of this sort, we know, is inseparable from human nature; but it has never given its impression to society, in this country, as at the present moment.

It is pleasing to perceive in connexion with this increase of social activity, intelligence, and enterprise, a more adequate and practical *regard to the great ends of society*, or to the duties which men owe to one another in their social capacity. Our population has increased with great rapidity; and it is a fact, affording a melancholy confirmation of the scripture doctrine of human depravity, that always in proportion as you crowd men together, if you sharpen their intelligence, you multiply the hazards of vicious infection. We have endeavoured, in various ways, to provide against this natural and alarming tendency of affairs; and if our success has been only partial, particularly in the view of the unreflecting, this should be no matter of surprise. The question on this point is not, whether society is now all we could wish, or all we might have hoped, but rather, whether its state is not incalculably better than it would have been in the absence of our exertions in its behalf. It is not saying too much to affirm, that had the evil tendency adverted to been allowed to work on without the new power of counteraction supplied by the exertions of the better portion of the community, society, in our case, would have been, ere this, on the verge of dissolution. But as it is, depraved as we are, it will hardly be doubted by any impartial and informed man, that this old world has never contained so large a com-

munity as this of Great Britain, including so great an amount of public virtue. We have in this land, at this hour, greater security for person and property than has existed among us in any preceding age, or in any other country in any age of time ;—and be it remembered, that on this security mainly depends all that we mean by social happiness. What our laws, institutions, and usages are in this respect, they are as the effect of the intelligence and social virtue by which we are distinguished as a people. They have their impress from the mind of the community ; and if you would improve them still further, it must not be by theorizing upon them as abstractions, but by raising the mental and moral aptitudes of the community to a still higher standard.

But it is not only our lot to be placed in juxtaposition with a different *world* (so to speak), from that which existed formerly. We have to maintain our ground by the side of *an Established Church, upon which time has also produced great changes.* The rulers of that church no longer regard the condition of the sleeper as a condition of safety. Nor is it any longer considered probable that the nation would be found to uphold the endowed Church, if it should haughtily refuse to sympathize with the more independent and vigorous spirit which has risen up around it, and within it. It has yielded, accordingly, in many things, to the spirit of the times. Its present state exhibits a singular combination of parties.

The old Orthodox party in the Church is in that process of improvement which has divided them into two classes. Beside these, there is the Evangelical party ; and in addition, a fourth, made up of persons from all the rest, who, disagreeing as they do on many points,

are of one mind in the approval of those High-church doctrines in regard to the christian ministry, and the efficacy of the sacraments, which were advocated by the court clergy in the reign of the Stuarts, and so late as the time of Queen Anne, and which are in scarcely any thing distinguishable from the doctrines of Popery.

The last of these parties, whose views are expounded in the Oxford Tracts, to which reference has been made, consist of persons who have persuaded themselves that the only means by which to bring back the people of this country to that state of ecclesiastical obedience from which they have been so long departing, is to reiterate the too much forgotten doctrine, that salvation is by the sacraments of the Church ; that those sacraments can be validly administered by one fixed order of persons only ; that the clergy of the Established Church are alone that order ; and that all persons in separation from them, whatever semblance of religion they may possess, must be really without religion, and without any scriptural ground on which to hope that they shall not perish everlastingly. These frightful dogmas may be viewed by some as too preposterous to need refutation or notice. The men who advocate them, however, are men of learning, some of them men of piety, and most of them men of character ; and there is too much congeniality in such doctrines with the high-minded and superstitious tendencies of human nature, to allow of their being without danger. It was this congeniality which gave to these notions their root in the early church, and the wide and disastrous influence which attended them so long afterwards. Friendly intercourse between the Churchman and the Dissenter, which we, in our simplicity, might be disposed to regard as the triumph of a chris-

tian intelligence and charity, over a popish ignorance and bigotry, the persons referred to denounce as a practice which tends to obliterate the sin of hostility to the only accredited ministers of religion—though the same with that of Corah and his company, and to be followed by similar punishment! Thus the excesses of the nineteenth century are to be counteracted by calling back the darkness of the middle age; extravagance producing extravagance; and, as in all seasons of excitement, minds of similar culture are found betraying a susceptibility of widely opposite influences. There are things which have their best cure in being left alone; there are others which gather strength from neglect: and it is the province of wisdom to distinguish between these. If both the church and the country should be put to some trouble by this attempt to revive the very worst doctrines of Popery, under cover of the loudest pretensions to Protestantism, there is enough in human nature, after all our boasted intelligence, to render such an evil in no way surprising.

In the Orthodox clergy, we see a body of men greatly in advance of those who preceded them in the last century, particularly in the early part of it. We shall not attempt any description of the sort of clergymen who were then common in this country, particularly in our villages. Suffice it to say, that at present a regard to decency—a sort of ecclesiastical decorum, has become imperative, where piety, according to the more scriptural view of it, may be wanting. And while those who are the least changed are in general thus far improved, a learned, a numerous, and a highly respectable body of clergymen has grown up among them, who bring to the service of the pulpit no ordinary ability, together with a

grave and devotional spirit; and who, while refusing to be accounted Evangelical, in the conventional meaning of that word, are producing an effect on the public mind, which was for some time peculiar to the labours of that party.

The discourses of this class of preachers may be wanting in some degree in the clear announcement of the doctrines of the Gospel, and still more in the forcible application of them to the interior working of the human spirit. They may be more remarkable for the scholar-like eloquence which pervades them, than as exposing to the full the malady of our fallen nature, and as applying the remedy with a corresponding amplitude and earnestness. But still there is in them a tone of serious piety, that is quite refreshing in comparison with the dull and barren themes which they have generally superseded: and above all, there is a compass, an accuracy, and an explicitness in the manner in which they enforce the connexion between the piety and the morality of religion, which not a few Evangelical preachers, both Churchmen and Dissenters, would do well to imitate.

In no respect, however, is the improved condition of the Endowed Church so manifest as in the increased and still increasing numbers of its Evangelical ministers. In the time of Watts and Doddridge, men like Hervey and Romaine were as green spots in the wide-spread desert. The Church has now some two thousand of such ministers. But the Evangelical clergy of the present day, while holding the same theological opinions with their devout predecessors who were expelled from the pulpits of the Establishment in 1662, are characterised by a singular absence of sympathy with those conscientious and holy men in their objections to many things in the

discipline and worship of the Established Church, and in their ardent attachment to the principles of free government. The regulations and forms of the Church of England, though on the whole stationary amidst the ceaseless current of affairs during almost three centuries, are regarded by the good men adverted to as still unimprovable; while, in reference to the common liberties of Englishmen, their leaning seems almost constantly to be on the side opposed to the popular elements of the constitution—so much so, that to no quarter might the advocates of arbitrary power look with greater confidence of support, should they happen to possess the reputation of being friends to the Church. Some exceptions to this rule may no doubt be found among the clergy, and more among the laity: but exceptions they are, and I fear comparatively few. Nor would it be easy to mention a more formidable impediment to the progress of serious religion among us—particularly with the more independent and energetic portion of the community—than arises from this deficiency of large and generous sentiment on public affairs, so observable in the greater part of the Evangelical clergy. Of course, all such persons have reasons to assign, which, to themselves at least, afford a sufficient justification of their conduct. They persuade themselves that the ascendancy of their party is inseparable from the safety and happiness of the community, and that they are attached to the former purely for the sake of the latter; and no doubt they are generally sincere in making this profession. But it still remains to be asked, whether it is really desirable that christian ministers should so conduct themselves as to seem to be more concerned about their Church than about their country; and whether it be well that their

piety should seem to do nothing toward bringing them into friendly intercourse with Christians of other communions, compared with what their religious prejudices seem to do in the way of keeping them apart from them? One knows it will be said—The Dissenters have behaved themselves ill, and have deserved to be so avoided. But is it beyond all doubt that this quarrel has been so unlike what generally happens in our world, that the faults have all been on one side? Is it quite certain that there is perfect intelligence and well-meaning in the one connexion, and nothing of either in the other? But on this subject I have ventured to speak in another place.

Such, then, is the present state of the Church of England, as compared with the past. Almost everywhere there is a professional decorum observed by her ministers, which was not unfrequently disregarded, sometimes to a shameful extent, by their predecessors of the last century. Over a large surface the system of instruction has become more serious, scriptural, and effective; while in many hundreds of her pulpits “the pure word of God is preached,” and many thousands of the people are manifestly regenerated by its influence. Moreover, the religious and philanthropic institutions of our time find great numbers of steady and earnest supporters in that communion; and many attempts to do good are made, both by laity and clergy, which break somewhat through the old forms of ecclesiastical observance. In these signs of improvement, every devout heart must rejoice.

Between the Church of England as thus changed, and the older and more regular Dissenters, a third body has made its appearance, occupying a considerable space in

the three kingdoms, particularly in England. We refer, of course, to the Methodists. The spirit of Calvinistic Methodism has merged itself almost everywhere in the system of Independency. But Wesleyan Methodism still retains the separate position to which it was destined by its founder. Every devout and benevolent mind, unless much obscured and perverted by prejudice, must look with delight on the large amount of religious and social benefit which has been conferred on our country and our colonies by this numerous and zealous body of Christians. We may deem their opinions in some respects erroneous; we may regard certain of their usages as tending to nourish enthusiasm and false confidence, by substituting morbid fancies in the place of truly religious impressions; and, above all, we may consider their polity, both in relation to their congregations, and to the great body of their ministers, as singularly opposed to primitive usage and christian liberty:—nevertheless, it has its redeeming properties. It has seized on the great elements of revealed truth, and has announced them, if not with all the discrimination, at least with an earnestness worthy of the better ages of the Church; and in regard to general intelligence and catholic feeling, has improved rapidly during the present century.

That the system will not last, but, like every other originating less in permanent principles than in passing circumstances, will fall, in its turn, by the same influences which have favoured its existence, may be safely predicted. All ancient establishments have a tendency, by reason of their opulence and independence, to lethargy and corruption; and all, as the consequence, have witnessed the breaking forth of such offshoots. But each

in process of time has fallen into the snare against which its primitive protest was directed ; and the renovating principle, having become useless in the hands which had seized upon it, has been taken up by another order of regenerators. Thus the monastic life came in upon the declining fervour of the primitive church ; the mendicant orders upon the diminished zeal of their brethren of the monastery ; and the Jesuits followed in the train of both. Each of these orders was more powerful than the former ; and each so became as the effect of circumstances—or of the constantly improving social condition of Europe ; and all, in the ages to which they belong, in common with Methodism in our time, performed important services in relation to the general influence and progress of Christianity, their very errors being made subservient, in many respects, to the interests of truth.

Let no man be offended by this sort of comparison. It is not made with an intention to depreciate. The only comparison intended is that of relationship to established ecclesiastical systems—and the same holds, in a degree, of all Dissenters. Not a few monks and mendicant friars might be named, whose piety and learning were of an order rarely attained in our age. God has often worked by means, which the world, and even the church, have been wont to look upon with scorn. But wise men have seen enough of late, in the conduct of certain parties, who seem to be pillars of Wesleyan Methodism, to force upon them the suspicion that the apostolic maxim, “ Be not high-minded, but fear,” has not always been sufficiently remembered in that quarter. It is easy to sow the seeds of division—difficult to free the soil from their effects. He is not a sagacious man, who, in a country like ours, can calculate

on the entire passiveness of large bodies of men, called from the middle and humbler classes of society. It is a fact, as we understand, that the political sentiments recently expressed by some leaders of Methodism, have not found a response in the shape of a petition to the legislature against the claims of the Protestant Dissenters from a single Methodist congregation, while numbers have petitioned in support of those claims. The great majority of the Wesleyan people know that they have been accustomed to receive many kind offices from Dissenters in all parts of the kingdom; while, by that political party to which some of their chiefs have been forward to do such open homage, they have been commonly denounced as the worst order of fanatics; and few things have been accounted more meritorious than to send their ministers to prison, if found preaching in the highways or the fields. The author has been a party to the rescue of such offenders from their place with pickpockets and housebreakers, and from the necessity of appearing in the wooden shoes and wretched garb allotted to the basest criminals. Let us not judge of the Wesleyan Methodists, in this respect, by those who affect to represent them. The laity, we know, are not to be concluded on such matters by their ministers; and the silence of many among the ministers themselves must not be interpreted by any means as consent.

Such then, in brief, is the position, general and ecclesiastical, in which we are placed as Congregationalists at the present juncture. It now behoves us to inquire, in what manner we may pursue our course in these novel circumstances, so as best to subserve the cause of religious truth, of our country, and of humanity.

With a view to these ends, it will be of the first

importance that we cultivate much of that *heartfelt piety* by which our pious forefathers were distinguished. In our preaching, our intercourse, our families, and in our public efforts, let the advancement of real piety be manifestly the object of our great solicitude. Our union and strength among ourselves, the increase of our own denomination, and our influence over others; the honour of our country, and the good of mankind,—all will depend, and to what extent we cannot possibly foresee, on our maintaining that constant and devout intercourse with “the things of the Spirit,” which is enjoined upon us with so much force of persuasion and authority in Holy Scripture. Living under the influence of such habits, we shall act in all connexions with the sober consideration proper to our calling as Christians; and, at the same time, with the steadiness of principle; with the courage of men whose trust is in God; and with that degree of perseverance to which Providence generally awards success. Without this, our Congregationalism will be of small avail. Its use is simply as means to an end. But in alliance with this spirit, we may find in it an immense advantage. Its free and generous provisions are in admirable keeping with the confiding and fearless impulses of the truly devout heart.

If we would keep the position to which we have attained, and improve its advantages as duty requires, we must endeavour to *give the utmost efficiency to our Public Institutions*. The world around us, as we have seen, was never more active, energetic, or efficient in its endless departments of occupation, than at this moment. And it is no less observable, that every division of the visible church is characterized by a similar spirit. Hence, nothing but corresponding effort can prevent our

being thrust from the ground on which we stand. To indulge the expectation of any advancement, without a marked increase of wise and holy exertion, would only be to betray our weakness. If content with less effort, less sacrifice, or less earnest intercession before God, with a view to the diffusion of divine truth, we must be content to see our place occupied by those who will be more worthy of it; and that increase of the piety and happiness of mankind which we might have been the means of conferring, will be conferred by others. Every communion of Christians has more comprehensive views than formerly concerning its obligations in this respect; more buoyant confidence as to what it may be possible to accomplish; and has become, in consequence, more organized, laborious, and effective. The world, in short, moves at a more rapid rate; the same may be said of the church; and if there be any branch of it that does not feel impelled so to do, that branch will soon be numbered among "the things that are ready to die."

Concerning such efforts we shall not perhaps be found wanting, if compared with any other section of the christian church. But this is more than may be said with regard to our *encouragement of learning*, and our apparent estimate of its importance in relation to the progress of religion. If we are not to retrograde, there must be improvement on this point. Among our scholars there are men who in theological learning, and in the learning strictly subsidiary to it, would do honour to any communion; and we are not without minds imbued with a love of general literature, and distinguished by various reading and refined taste. The latter, however, are of much more rare occurrence than the former; while,

almost as a body, we are not only deficient in sympathy with such pursuits, but frequently betray a disposition, except in particular connexions, to slight and neglect the literary productions of our own authors, in favour of publications, often much less valuable, as put forth from other quarters. Let the common charge of ignorance and vulgarity be preferred against us, and the debater on the side of Dissent will immediately appeal to a series of names and works, as so many proofs to the contrary; while perhaps our polemic has never himself read a single volume in the series he has enumerated, nor made a single effort or sacrifice to encourage the sort of labour which has produced them. We see he does not need to be told that it is important to the credit and the general influence of his denomination, that such men should be found in it, and that such works should be made public by them; but his conclusion seems to be, that this advantage will be realized by some process or other which is not to cost *him* any thing. He does not bear in mind, that the literature of Dissenters, left in this manner to live as by miracle in its own proper circle, is too commonly regarded with jealousy or rooted disaffection elsewhere. Of course, all Dissenters are not chargeable with this delinquency, but this is, beyond doubt, a very prevalent fault,—so much so, perhaps, as to constitute, just now, the weak side of Dissent. It must be acknowledged, that the majority of our people are not of a class with whom much interest in relation to such things can be expected; but there is sufficient wealth and intelligence in the minority to make their deficiencies in this respect not a little discreditable to them.

We are not curious to know how it happens,—but

unfriendly as is the reception generally given to the works of Dissenters by persons ecclesiastically opposed to them, a book is scarcely ever regarded as truly valuable by the mass of our people, until it has extorted some favourable notice from parties known to be hostile to Dissent. So far, indeed, is the body of Dissenters from having formed a too favourable idea of the talents and acquirements of their leading men, considered as authors, and from exercising an implicit confidence in their guidance, that could it be demonstrated to-morrow, that the Eclectic Review is conducted with a degree of ability not at all inferior to that of the leading quarterly journals of literature, it is almost certain that Dissenters themselves would be really the last section of the community to come into that opinion. In making these statements, I am only giving expression to what I have heard again and again from many of the most dispassionate and able men in our communion. Doubtless, much of our literature may deserve the neglect into which it falls, and feeble men, beset with a passion for authorship, will lay the blame anywhere, rather than in the right place; but these admissions do not at all affect the accuracy or importance of the above observations.

It is to the learning of our predecessors—unmindful as their descendants may sometimes appear to be of the fact—that Congregationalism is indebted for much of the influence it has obtained in this kingdom. It was this which gave so much efficiency to the small band of Dissenting ministers in the Westminster Assembly; which qualified the same class of men to check, in some degree, the fanatical extravagance that sprung up among the Cromwellian soldiery; which enabled them to leave the University of Oxford at the Restoration, in a much

better state than they found it;* and which in Owen and Howe produced eminent persons, who could speak before courts and princes in this cause, and could advocate its claims from the press with a power which the intelligence of their times was not able to gainsay. It was this also which gave to Watts and Doddridge the position they held in their own time, not only as leaders of the party to which they were attached, but as the friends and correspondents of the most distinguished men of their day; and which demonstrated to that age, and shows even to our own time, the connexion that may, and that ever ought to subsist, between the character of the Dissenting minister, and that pure and dignified attention to all the courtesies of life which results so naturally from a love of learning. We owe our existence and our progress to discussion; and the weapons of our warfare have been effective in proportion to the literary adroitness and power with which they have been wielded. We come in as Congregationalists, upon a state of society in which men have much to unlearn, in order to their becoming participants in our views. It has thus become necessary to our progress, that we should be familiar with the knowledge embraced in the wide compass of our argument, and skilled in making it to bear against the errors, as we consider them, which are prevalent about us. If a necessity of this kind existed formerly, it is by no means less apparent at the present time. In fact, it was never so true of the past, as it is of the present—that a party without literature, must be a party without power. Defence, against a

* Clarendon's Hist. iii. 246, 298, 317, 350; v. 169, 481-2. Orme's Life of Owen, 169-187.

thousand modes of assault, is impossible, except by this means. Literature, science, every thing tending to human improvement, is now in such pervading and ceaseless motion, and all so liable to be put into requisition on the side of error, that our choice is either to engage in these pursuits with the prevailing ardour, and to give them a wise direction, or else to see them everywhere turned against us. Let the Dissenting layman, then, consider this matter, and let him inquire whether he has been accustomed to look on the connexion between the literature and the power of his denomination in its true light: and let him especially ask himself, whether literature in this department has received from him all the encouragement he might have bestowed upon it; or whether, giving himself up to an unsympathizing selfishness, it has been left, at least so far as he is concerned, to droop and to perish. Next to the increase of our piety, I should look on an increased attention to such objects as the best indication of our growing strength.

It may be observed further, that if we are not to be found wanting in the new position which Providence has assigned to us, it will be necessary that our *standard of ministerial qualification* should be considerably raised. If the rate of activity, the average intelligence, the spirit of enterprize, and the habit of contemplating moral and religious questions, now observable in society, are all much in advance of any thing of the kind previously existing, it must be obvious that the Dissenting minister, if he is to keep pace with this new impetus that has come upon human affairs, must be a man capable of adapting himself to the exigencies which have been thus produced. To the sort of education, and the con-

sequent spirit of candour and urbanity, which characterized his predecessors during the interval from the Revolution to the rise of Methodism, it is needful he should add knowledge somewhat more varied; greater aptness to teach; a better acquaintance with the world; a habit of more diversified labour; and, as the effect, a more prompt, skilful, and energetic mind in matters of business. But this is an object that will not be realized, except by study and effort,—and by these, not only as existing among ministers themselves, but as favoured much more than at present by the feeling and conduct of our churches generally.

With regard to the faculty of observation, and the power of adapting himself to the diversities of human character, which are now so necessary to success in every connexion, there is, no doubt, enough in the proceedings of every considerable charge among Dissenters, to call forth and to mature such ability on the part of a minister, wherever there is aptitude for that kind of improvement. Young ministers, however, frequently enter on the pastoral office without that degree of preparation, in this respect, which should have formed an important part of their academical progress. Not a few of them pass from the ill-regulated habits of a grammar-school—or from connexions even less favourable to this kind of reflection and self-control, or to that delicacy and propriety of manners to which it naturally leads—into their place in college, where their great object, in general, is to acquit themselves with credit in their classes, and in their efforts as preachers; the kind of knowledge adverted to being left to be acquired by slow degrees, and too often by means of much bitter experience. With a mind intent

perhaps, on higher objects, the youthful pastor is sometimes long in finding out how much he has suffered in some directions even from so trivial a cause as the want of more attention to small matters in social intercourse, particularly in general society; while, in other directions, he may begin to perceive, though possibly when it is somewhat too late, how much less difficult it is to produce excellent sermons, than so to govern himself, and so to control the various tendencies of the little commonwealth over which he presides, as to perpetuate harmony, and to secure from the elements about him a vigorous co-operation in his different plans of usefulness. Where there is the groundwork of good natural parts, this sort of wisdom will be acquired, but not perhaps, even in such cases, until the better half of life has been at some disadvantage from the want of it, and chequered with disquietudes which an earlier possession of it might in great part have prevented. Our ministers—even the least experienced of them—are generally so grounded in theological study, as to be rarely, if ever, moved by those “winds of doctrine,” which carry away so many of the clergy of the Established Church: and if a similar effort were made with a view to the formation of wise and vigorous habits in relation to the pastoral office, and to that commerce with society at large that must now be familiar to the Dissenting minister, the happiest effects would follow.

But the minister eminently qualified in these respects, may find much in his circumstances, rendering it next to impossible that his habits should be of the description necessary to real scholarship. Our churches are of course pleased when they find in their pastors, men capable of serving the cause of religion in this higher

department of labour. But they too often afford proof that they know not well how to submit to those sacrifices on their own part, which must generally attend the efficiency of such efforts in the public service on the part of their ministers. Dissenting ministers are often described as ignorant men, obtruding themselves on an office to the duties of which they are not competent; and few persons, perhaps, would be more indignant while listening to such representations, than the very parties who have been least disposed to forego any demand on the time of their minister, though strictly necessary if charges of this nature are to receive a practical refutation. What with their limited means, the too general want of sympathy with any thing like learned study on the part of those with whom they are immediately connected, and the force of prejudice on which they have to calculate in most directions beyond their own circle, it is truly surprising that so great a number of Dissenting ministers should have furnished such decided evidence of solid acquirement. It required a high degree of self-sustained energy to make them what they are in such circumstances. Every thing about them seemed to conspire to keep them down to the level of a tame mediocrity. But if there are minds which master circumstances, it should be remembered that the majority are surely mastered by them.

If then it be necessary, in connexion with the present improved and more prevalent tone of education, that the Dissenting minister of the present day should be in various respects an improvement on the past, it is not less obvious that his circumstances must be made more favourable to scholar-like habits—and this is a change which must be effected mainly by the better feeling of

our churches. To this end, it will be necessary that we should give the best support in our power to our various colleges; that we endeavour to render the systems of instruction in them as efficient as possible; that more consideration should be exercised in the demands made on the time of our ministers in the way of visits for common talk; and above all, it will be needed that we should study, in the spirit of apostolic times, to make it evident that we esteem the men who have taken the oversight of us, "very highly in love, for their work's sake." In all these respects, we are in reality making advances, but the rate is slow; and much more must be done, if we would more frequently attract toward the Dissenting ministry the class of minds most capable of raising its character, and rendering important service to the great cause with which it is identified. God will not fail to send our churches men of power, as well as piety—men equal in all respects to meet the spirit of the times in which we live—in proportion as we are found capable of setting a proper value on such bestowments.

My plea in this place, it will be perceived, is on behalf of the *laborious* minister—the devout man, anxious to husband the fragments of time that may be secured from the regular course of his duties, in order to his own improvement in knowledge and mental power. For such as can waste even their leisure in trivial affairs, while holding such an office in such times, I have nothing to offer. It is probable that our men of action would some of them be much improved by being more men of study; and our men of study would some of them perhaps be the better for becoming more men of action. But these faults of mere apportionment are

small, when compared with the *crime* of indolence. It is not desirable that all our ministers should have the habits of close students : the majority, perhaps, may be better employed otherwise. What we mean is, that those whose inclinations lead them to the labours of the study, should be less discouraged than they are wont to be in such pursuits ; that, in general, our ministers must be men of more intellectual acquirement than formerly ; and that no person without the preliminary of good natural parts, together with a fixed love of reading, should be encouraged to lay his hand at all upon this work. It would be cruel to introduce men into the Dissenting ministry at present, who were seen entering it, and with a measure of success, some thirty or forty years ago. A habit of labour—and, in a great degree, of mental labour—is now indispensable to success, even in the most humble connexion. Methodism, on this point, has taught us some lessons which we cannot too soon unlearn. In fact, our Methodist brethren have themselves become considerably aware of their error in this respect, and are endeavouring to correct it, by the institution of permanent colleges for the education of their ministers :—a measure strictly necessary, if sects are to become permanent, when the force of novelty and the rage of persecution have subsided.

As my last word of humble advice, I would venture to say, Let us study to maintain and to *exercise the charity of the Gospel* toward every communion of Christians. In this respect no party has been without fault. But if we cannot be of one mind, the present state of society is such as to render it to the last degree undesirable that our differences should be insisted on in a spirit not accordant with the acknowledged temper

of the religion we profess. We are surrounded by men who are wise in their generation. No flaw, no discrepancy can escape them. They discover as much aptness as inclination to detect and expose all false pretences. They well know that Christians should be good men, and should love one another; and they will look on nothing as Christianity which is not attested by such fruits. To hold principles which we profess to value, and to shrink from an open avowal of them, or from efforts to diffuse them, is a species of insincerity, which shrewd minds, whatever the timid or the selfish may persuade themselves, will not fail to see through and to despise. On the other hand, such men will not be less keen-eyed in observing whether the religious disputant is characterized by a spirit of his own, or in nothing distinguishable from the mere political partisan. Yes—the heavens are gathering, and, let rulers or parties do what they may, the storm will come, and the religion to survive will be that which is least beset with the trammels of sectarianism, and most imbued with a spirit of charity toward all mankind. Let good men of all denominations be only true to themselves, reserving their chief solicitude for the great christian interest, and their fears as to the effect of all possible changes may be given to the winds. But while we are agreed in lamenting the prevalence of irreligion, the strength of the antagonist power has done little toward producing that union among ourselves, of which, in a less diseased state of things, it would surely have been the occasion. It is a bad sign when the enemy thundering at the gate, fails to silence the noise of faction within. Of a state so envenomed by discord we should have small hope. It is not easy to say where the

greater portion of blame may attach ; but if our brethren are determined to perpetuate the scandal and weakness of disunion, even in such circumstances, let it at least be our continual study and earnest prayer that the fault henceforward may not rest with us !

We shall, perhaps, find this course of proceeding less difficult, if we seriously inquire whether we have been accustomed to look on the influence of circumstances, in producing religious preferences in the case of those who differ from us, with a sufficient degree of consideration. Under influences of this nature, we have all been led to adopt error, much of which we no doubt still retain. Hence it should be our concern duly to weigh the force of similar causes, in regard to our brethren whom we believe to be mistaken. Our own peace of mind will be materially promoted by our being able, in this manner, to judge more favourably with respect to those who differ from us. Their case, we may be sure, is never so simple as bigotry will be forward to assert. Such is our infirmity, that all extended and complex questions are sure to be viewed, in the majority of cases, under particular aspects only ; and, as the consequence, very different conclusions will be formed concerning them. An erroneous conception may result almost entirely from a vicious partiality ; but more commonly it will be the effect, in great part, of positive inability to look at the whole of the question : and the particular points of the great subject, on which this narrow power of observation has been fixed, are those probably which a multitude of circumstances have tended to place continually in view. Hence it generally requires a strong effort of imagination, and of something more, to form any thing like a fair moral estimate of the character of an opponent. In

fact, we shall never deal justly with each other in this respect in the present world. Some abatement of the evil is all that can be expected.

The causes which serve to make us what we are in matters of opinion and feeling are not only innumerable, and of endless variety, but so intermixed as not to admit of a clear separation from each other; and so constant and imperceptible is their operation, as to produce the greatest effects without allowing their power to become apparent, or even to be suspected. In the natural world, the greatest changes are frequently wrought by influences which do their office as by stealth. The dew descending to the earth, the night giving place to day, and the winter to the summer, are effects resulting from causes so concealed or imperceptible as to elude our power of observation. Important as is the work to be accomplished, it is perfected so slowly, and in a manner so noiseless, that nearly all we can say of it is that—it is done. It is the same in the moral world. Those notions and impressions which we are most confident we shall always retain, may often be traced to influences which have operated upon us in this unobtrusive, silent, ceaseless manner, and the real power of which, in consequence, we may never have attempted to understand. The peculiarities of our age and country, domestic training, subsequent education, station in society, natural capacity and temperament—these, and other circumstances, have borne with a steady pressure upon us, fixing their impress on the mind and habit from day to day, and from hour to hour, and fixing it the more deeply from doing so by little and little. In some instances, this current, by which our course has been so much governed, has tended toward truth and good-

ness ; in more, possibly, it has taken a different direction. Indeed, we may confide that it has often taken the prohibited course in our own case, if we have not been very much upon our guard against danger from this source. In that case, what the causes adverted to have done in secret, need to be examined as in the light of day ; the work they have carried forward imperceptibly, will require to be retraced through the steps of its progress : and, as the result, much that we have learned as by yielding to a stream, will remain to be unlearned as by working against it.

While the sources of error are thus difficult to deal with on account of their multitude, their variety, their combinations, and the silence and secrecy with which they affect us, it is often no less difficult to exercise a sound discrimination upon the consequences which follow from these causes. The great lines of demarcation may be sufficiently manifest, but the instances are many in which the shades of truth and error, and of good and evil, so blend themselves to our imperfect discernment, as to baffle the attempts we make to distinguish between them. Every moral truth, by being urged beyond its proper limit, may become error ; and every virtuous feeling, in the same manner, may become vicious. These opposites always border upon each other. Lord Bacon has remarked concerning Scripture prophecies, that they are like grapes, which are found to supply a wholesome wine if pressed only to a certain point, but which yield a juice of an injurious quality if pressed further. This observation is not more applicable to the prophecies of Scripture than to its doctrines, and, in fact, to every thing belonging to truth and duty ; every thing good having its place in near connexion with

the evil in which it is liable to become merged—clemency degenerating into weakness, its opposite into inhumanity; liberality becoming profusion, and frugality ending in covetousness. These moral landmarks must be subject to great disturbance while man continues to be what he has hitherto been; and the confusion thus produced is increased and perpetuated, by our continuing to give fair names to qualities, long after they have sunk, more or less, into their neighbouring vices. Mention is here made of these things merely to indicate the propriety of guarding against rash judgment, concerning the real or the supposed culpability of persons whom we believe to be in error. “With what judgment ye mete ye shall be judged.”

Nor do we, perhaps, sufficiently bear in mind the possible necessity, in our imperfect world, of the kind of stimulus that is supplied by the rivalries of party with respect to religion, in common with other things. Despotism has its repose in the absence of opposition. But in literature, in science, in all that relates to good government and commercial enterprise, the approach toward perfection has been in proportion to the extent in which these objects have been thrown open to rival claimants. Collision between the parts has given sharpness and power to the whole, and has everywhere seemed to be necessary to that end. We are not slow to affirm, that nearly every thing good in the Established Church has its existence there as the effect of her juxtaposition with the more wakeful energies of Dissent. But are we certain that Dissent itself would have been what it now is, in the absence of the sort of rivalry which has been inseparable from our position in regard to such an Ecclesiastical Establishment? Is it beyond doubt that

we should have possessed all our present vigour, though affected little, if at all, by this kind of competition ?

As the mutual jealousy of angry disputants, in the early ages of the church, led to a watchful oversight of the canonical Scriptures, which served to protect them, in a signal manner, against the possibility of being corrupted, so the partisanship of our own time has, no doubt, its good as well as its evil to perform. We do well to deplore it so far as it is unchristian, but shall do well also to look upon it, so long as it is not to be removed by the use of christian means, as an occasion in the providence of God, requiring us to abound in the exercise of the more difficult virtues belonging to our profession as Christians. In truth, the more I consider this subject, the more I am obliged to suspect, that our zeal in the cause of our own sort of uniformity, too often partakes of the same element with that of the men whom we justly censure as the persecutors of our pious forefathers. It is true, we renounce all right or power to persecute on account of religion ; but are we as anxious to find out arguments that should serve to nourish a catholic spirit, notwithstanding our differences, as we are to make out a strong case against our opponents ? Is it as manifest that we love all good men, whatever their mistakes may be, as it is that we think them in error, and are persuaded that they ought to become as ourselves ? The Dissenter, as well as the Churchman, may care more about uniformity than about Christianity, and be, in consequence, while little suspecting it, more a formalist than a Christian ; and many, who do not err to that extent, may err in that direction. It is my earnest wish, in these concluding observations, to suggest such a train of reflection as may tend to correct this evil, in

whatever quarter it may exist, and to strengthen the charities that should unite, adorn, and bless the brotherhood of the universal church.

When the apostle describes the church as a *body*, of which all Christians are members, the figure which he employs, without being pressed beyond its due limits, may afford us an insight of high practical value into the general character and purpose of the Divine dispensations. In the first age of the church, the miraculous endowments conferred on a large portion of its members gave an extraordinary variety to ecclesiastical character and pretension. By this means some became possessed of "the word of wisdom," and some of "the word of knowledge:" one received the gift of "healing;" another the working of "miracles;" another "prophecy;" another "discerning of spirits;" another divers kinds of "tongues;" and another "the interpretation of tongues." Some were apostles, while some were merely called teachers; and others were known by the name of helps, and governments.*

This was a state of things in which nothing short of great supernatural aid could prevent the speedy appearance of haughty presumption on the one hand, and of envious discontent upon the other. It was proper to enjoin that "each should esteem others better than himself;" but to suppose that obedience to such a precept would follow, was certainly to expect the most difficult moral attainments, and in circumstances singularly opposed to their existence. Men, however, are accounted virtuous, not merely in proportion to the good they do, but to the evil they resist; and as it is not more true of

* 1 Corinthians, xii.

our physical than of our moral capabilities, that they acquire strength and readiness by exercise, it is not difficult to see, in the view thus afforded with regard to the complexion and circumstances of the primitive church, an important feature in the designs of the Redeemer with respect to the Christians of that period, and with regard to his people in the present world at all times, and even in the world to come.

It is true, the age of miraculous gifts has ceased : but the bestowments of Heaven in the economy of divine grace, as well as in nature and providence, present the same general features of subordination and variety. Be it remembered, then, that all the appetites and passions which exist in the world, exist in the church. In the wider space, they reign ; in the narrower, they are controlled, and in part subdued, by higher and better influences. It must be remembered, too, that all the incentives to such tendencies which beset us continually in the world, find their way more or less within the pale of the church. In the latter sphere, as in the former, there will be authority, with its temptations to self-will ; and subjection, with its proneness to insubordination ; success, with its suggestions to our pride ; and failure, with its influence upon our envy ; wealth, producing alienation from the poor ; and poverty, inducing the same feeling of separation from the rich ; and above all, diversities of judgment, of taste, and usage, on matters of religion, to become the occasion either of angry discussion, and it may be of something worse, or a circumstance to determine the existence, and to afford space for the exercise, of a large feeling of brotherhood.

Nor must we look on this condition of ecclesiastical affairs as the effect of chance. This variousness of

dispensation to the church, in common with what is seen in the world, is, in a great degree, from God; and the conflict which springs from it he will make conducive to his glory. It is his design, in the great commonwealth of the faithful, to secure the moral harmony of the whole, by the various and graduated operation of the parts. It is not concealed, that this manifold species of operation carries with it, in the present state of human nature, a strong tendency to disorder. There is danger, the Apostle intimates, lest the head, in the fulness of its pride, should say to the feet, "I have no need of you;" and lest the feet, dissatisfied with their inferiority, should say, "We are not of the body."

To meet the danger arising from this source, one of two things would seem to be necessary:—either all distinction between one rational creature and another must be removed, and the whole be placed on one level in all conceivable respects, so that no evil motive may be left to spring from a sense of superiority in one case, or of inferiority in another;—or else the mind of man must be so enlightened, and his moral sympathies so influenced, as to lead him to acknowledge the wisdom and benevolence of an unequal dispensation of the divine gifts. It does not need much reflection to become satisfied as to which of these methods of proceeding it would be most desirable should be chosen. The works of God are everywhere characterized by variety; and a plan to separate men from all temptation, either to presumption or discontent, by conferring benefits upon them on the principle of a strict monotonous equality, would have been to make human nature an exception to the general character of the system with which it is surrounded. For it must be remembered, that this supposed same-

ness, if it be to answer its supposed purpose, must extend to every thing—to the gifts of nature, and to our worldly allotments, no less than to the communications of divine grace. We find, however, that the dispensations of Heaven are not shaped so as to roll on upon a dull level of this sort. On the contrary, our heavenly Father has given more of the charm of variety to man, the noblest of his works, than to any other part of his creation at present known to us. It is his pleasure, that the understanding of man should ascend through all gradations between the verge of instinct and the wisdom of an angel; and that his heart should be the seat of heaven-born emotion, commencing with the lowest imperfection of such feeling on earth, until, as with a seraph ardour, it longs to depart and to be with Christ!

And when the All-wise determined, that his gifts to men, of every kind, should be thus variously bestowed, he did so that by this means a greater variety and strength of moral excellence might become necessary to the concord and happiness of his works; that this higher excellence might be called forth; and that its existence might be as a monument adapted, in the highest degree, to demonstrate his wisdom, and power, and goodness. He has created the distinction between rich and poor, that virtues for the manifestation of which there would otherwise have been no place might be brought into exercise. For the same reason, we have the classes of great and small in all other respects, and in the church as well as in the world. Creation itself is as “a body compact together by the strength which every joint supplieth;” and providence is the same, and the church, in this respect, is in harmony with both. To all these instances, everywhere bearing the features of the

sovereign disposal of benefits, the language of the Apostle is applicable :—The head cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you ; nor the eye to the hand, I have no need of thee.

Now, when we remember, not only that there are always degrees in human intelligence, and varieties in human temperament, education, and habit, but that even the corrective process of religion in the soul is as the little leaven, which by slow degrees leavens the whole lump, it is obvious that no mean part of our obligation as Christians must consist, in our maintaining a course proper to our profession, when exposed to the contradiction of sinners in the world, and when having to do with the ignorance, the errors, and the imperfections of good men in the church. We scarcely need repeat, that the portion of this ever-changing aspect of things which is the effect of sin, cannot be pleasing to Him who has described that evil as the abominable thing which his soul hateth ; but we see him take occasion, even from the disorders thus produced, to furnish a more striking manifestation of his wisdom, and purity, and benevolence. If the effect of differences, which exist as the result of his own immediate and holy appointment, has been to raise the mind to the culture of a more vigorous and comprehensive spirituality, presenting to it a wider sphere of obligation, and bracing it to a larger compass of duty ; why may not those which are the result of man's fall and depravity be also made to favour the exercise of a peculiar class of virtues, so as to add a new department to the modes of rational existence, and another field to the development of the latent power of his works ? When he makes his creatures to differ in a manner which involves no moral taint, it is

with this interesting object in view ; and we learn from the revelation of his will, that the differences which men have created for themselves by the outbreaks of their depravity, will be made to subserve the same end. In this larger sense, he will make the wrath of man to praise him. There is a class of sentiments, and a line of conduct, particularly incumbent on men toward each other, considered as being alike fallen creatures. Were they innocent, and their endowments not strictly the same, it would even then be a part of their obedience that the strong should bear with the natural infirmities of the weak. But as fallen natures, it is imperative on those who are strong in faith, or in any other religious grace, to bear with the infirmities of their weaker brethren. In this manner, even the irregularities which have their origin in sin, become the occasion of enriching the religion of a sinner with peculiar sentiments of humility, forbearance, tenderness, and charity ; not to mention resignation, patience, fortitude, and self-denial, which are also peculiar to the religion of such a being, as compared with angels, or with man in paradise. Apart from the fall of man, we may have known little or nothing of the Divine mercy ; and neither the church, nor “ the principalities and powers in heavenly places,” would have been privileged to contemplate that “ manifold wisdom of God,” or that marvellous exhibition of the separate and harmonized glory of the Divine perfections, which the redemption of the Cross has placed before them. The deeper wants of human nature gave occasion to this fuller manifestation of the Godhead ; and so, by a similar method of proceeding, the consequences of the Fall have become the occasion of a wider and stronger development of creature

obligation and obedience. We owe more as redeemed men, both to God and to one another, than could in other circumstances have devolved upon us; inasmuch as we have received more from above, and have more within us and around us to render us familiar with endurance, and to call us forth in the exercise of all kind offices.

Our great duty manifestly is, to keep this holy and benevolent design of God steadily in view; to consider the place assigned us in the body, the church, as from him; and to be assiduous in discharging the particular functions allotted to us, with a due consideration and tenderness toward every class of Christians, and every form of human infirmity. This would be to labour that there may "be no schism in the body." But the man who loses sight of this object, fails to apprehend the views of God as connected with the marked character of his dispensations, and instead of favouring their accomplishment, becomes an impediment in their way. He has failed to look with a due thoughtfulness on the nature of his position, and at his peculiar duties as arising from it; and he fails, in consequence, to act as a part, whose existence should tend to the good of the whole. He has fallen under the temptations of his state: instead of resisting them, and attaining by that very process of resistance to a higher and a more varied feeling of spirituality than could have become his in any other condition.

We can hardly conceive of the heavenly state itself, except as partaking in a great degree of the variety, though certainly not of the contradiction or imperfection, which belongs to the present. Were any place found in heaven for a tendency to disagreement, there

would be no lack of occasion for the play of discordant passions even in that state. Thus we not only read of angels, but of archangels; of Gabriel and Michael, as raised above their fellows; of thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers; and also of cherubim and seraphim;—descriptions which bring that world to the eye of our faith, as stored, hardly less than the present, with the ordinary incentives to envy, ambition, and similar feelings.

But the design of the benevolent Parent of the universe, in the dispensation he has commenced on earth, and that which he will perfect by its means in heaven, is to give such an ascendancy to the elements of sanctity in individual character, over all that is merely intellectual or external, that the spirit of willing subjection to his government, and of mutual love among his creatures, may be perfect and enduring, notwithstanding any variety either in the measure or the form in which his bounty may be shed upon them. How different are the outward apportionments, and the combinations of the intellectual and the moral, in the character even of good men in the present world! And where is the necessity, where is the reason, which should lead us to conclude that these characteristic features will cease to exist from the moment they enter heaven? Would it be in vain to search there for any of those individual traits, which once distinguished between the piety of “the son of thunder,” and that of “the son of consolation;” between the ardent temperament of Peter, and the placid tenderness of John; the power of holy principle in Elijah, and the power of that, and of feeling no less, in David? There are no opposites in heaven, because there is no sin there; but there may be degrees in every kind of capacity; and

these degrees in capacity may exist in different combinations, so that one nature may ascend high, and range far, in the calmer contemplation of the works of God, gazing upon them as in the profound thought of the cherubim ; while others, comprehending less, may feel more, worshipping for ever as with the transport of a seraph ! What we want in the church on earth is, more of the kind of wisdom which has been thus perfected in heaven. Our great need is just that amount of moral change and improvement which, while leaving all existing natural varieties as they are, except so far as they are the effects of sin, would secure a concurring and obedient habit of mind in regard to the Divine procedure, of so much power, as to enable us to look continually with a full contentment and gratitude on our own, and fervently to adore the character of God in the wide profusion of his bounty to others ; all his bestowments becoming endeared to the heart, as so many wonderful utterances of his Infinite Mind, in relation to creature capability and happiness !

My application of these remarks to our present point is as follows. Party spirit, carried to the excess of uncharitableness, is only one manifestation of a very common form of human depravity. Those who are chargeable with it, would be, in effect, the same men, if all party distinctions were at an end. The tendencies of the mind, which now fasten on the points in dispute between party and party, would then turn upon the points of difference between members of the same communion ; and even if all differences which have any thing of sinful infirmity in them could be put aside, the uncharitable heart would then fix itself on those purely innocent varieties, which have their origin from the boundless wisdom and benevolence of the Creator ;

and being one part of the body only, would begin to question the right of precedence that may have been assigned to others. Thus our forbearance toward each other, on all matters not inconsistent with the possession of religious character, is part of that general discipline on earth by which we are to be made meet for the harmony and blessedness of heaven; and the more we enter into this conception, and live under its influence, the more shall we realize of the tranquil happiness awaiting us in the future, even while surrounded by the imperfections and agitations of the present.*

* Nothing has been said in the foregoing pages with respect to the Roman Catholics. The misapprehension and excitement which prevail in connexion with this topic, led me to the conclusion that it would not be in my power to touch upon it with advantage; nor was it necessary to my object that I should do so. The nonconformist controversy is exclusively Protestant. I may observe, however, that one of the leading charges urged by the Puritans against the Royalists in the age of Charles I. was their inconsistency and impiety in accepting the services of Catholics; while in our own time, this precise ground of complaint is taken up by the descendants of the old Royalists, against the descendants of the Puritans. The army of the king was then denounced as Popish, from much the same cause that is now leading men to denounce the government of the queen as Popish. In fact, if you subject men of different religious creeds, to similar political disadvantages, it is inevitable that they should often seem to forget the points of religion in which they differ, in the joint ardour with which they seek the removal of the secular evils which they experience in common. Every species of sophistry and abuse may be put into constant requisition to prevent this: but the effect of these superadded injuries will be to strengthen the apparently unnatural association, so long as its cause is suffered to remain.

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